



The Unknown Warriors

Nicholas Pringle

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NICHOLAS PRINGLE

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“But all depends now upon the whole life-strength of the British race in every part of the world and of all our associated peoples and of all our well-wishers in every land, doing their utmost night and day, giving all, daring all, enduring all-to the utmost-to the end. This is no war of chieftains or of princes, of dynasties or national ambition; it is a war of peoples and of causes. There are vast numbers, not only in this Island but in every land, who will render faithful service in this war, but whose names will never be known, whose deeds will never be recorded. This is a War of the Unknown Warriors.”

Winston Churchill, July 14, 1940

This book is dedicated to the memory of all those friends, brothers and sisters, mentioned within these pages that did not return home and to those 'Unknown Warriors' that have passed away since contributing to this book.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)."

Introduction

In the Autumn of 2006, I wrote a letter to every regional newspaper in the UK in the hope that they would be published. Not all newspapers put the letter in their publications, however plenty did and the letter appeared in local papers right across the UK from Scotland to Cornwall. The letter was as follows;

“Did you serve in the armed services or essential civilian services during WW2?
I would like to find out what your opinions are of the country today and how you have found life since the end of the war.
Did you struggle to adjust to civvy street? Has there been enough support for veterans?
I am a freelance writer and plan to compile a book with your opinions of life in the UK in 2006.
Is it a disappointment or are you happy with how your country turned out? What do you think your fallen comrades would have made of life in 21st Century Britain?
All opinions are welcome, if possible provide a bit about your war experience, your views on the country, your name, age, rank and regiment. If you request your name will not be published if you would prefer to remain anonymous. Letters can be sent to Nick. Pringle at

I had no idea as to what response I would get, after all, if you were 20 years old in 1940, in 2006 you would be 86 and I wondered if veterans would be bothered about responding....Well, they certainly proved this theory wrong as many letters started to arrive, the oldest from a 96 year old D-day veteran. After the letter appeared in Saga magazine I even started to receive emails from veterans. The oldest silver surfer was 87 and he sent me plenty of great photos of his time in the Green Howards that he had scanned and attached to his emails.

Something about the letter seemed to have stirred the veterans and many took it as a chance to get things off their chests, remember experiences that might at some point be lost in the mists of time, and to give their views on the country they fought so bravely for. Arthritic fingers, failing eyesight and shaky hands wasn't going to stop them. After a while I realised that there was still places the letter had not appeared, so I continued to send out the letter to various places over the following two years, with the last letters appearing in newspapers in 2008.

Unfortunately, the letter was not printed in quite a few and despite sending the letter a number of times to the same papers it was never featured. Of course this was their decision to make and I do not know the reason why they decided not to publish it. The result of not getting the letter published in these towns and cities means that veterans living in these places were unaware of the appeal, and I am sure that if the letter had appeared, a number of them would have wrote to me. However, on a positive note, after plotting all the contributions on a map, it showed that they really do come from right across the UK from all four home nations, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, and from a wide variety of places, from sleepy hamlets to our greatest metropolis, London.

There is many books covering World War Two, and places like the Imperial War Museum have over the years collated a treasure chest of video, audio and written material of the veterans experiences. However, in my opinion there was something missing, and that was how the veterans adapted to peacetime and also what they think of the country today. After all, although five years is a long time, over sixty years later a lot has happened since the guns felt silent. I have seen reports and documentaries on

the effect of shell shock on World War One veterans. Homelessness, Post Traumatic Stress, and alcoholism amongst recent ex-servicemen from the Falklands and the Gulf War, but I can never recall hearing much about how the war effected veterans of World War Two.

Then when it comes to events and present day problems I can not really recall any WWII veterans being asked for their opinions by the media. Different 'community leaders', 'think tanks', 'experts' 'politicians', 'celebrities' all get airtime but can you ever recall a wise war veteran asked their opinion on issues like invading Iraq, the EU, crime etc? So I thought I would find out what they make of the country, that unlike most of us today have actually fought to defend, losing friends and family along the way.

I've always enjoyed reading books of letters and diaries and it was in the early days of this book project I happened by chance to come across a quote from Captain James Cook on the internet from his diaries, describing his travels in the Icy Antarctic Circle. I didn't know that he had wrote a diary of his journey's, so I got a copy.

"This entertainment was now and then suspended for a few minutes, at these intervals there were wrestling and boxing matches; the first were performed in the same manner as at Otahiete, and the second very little different from the method practiced in England. But what struck us with the most surprise was to see a couple of lusty wenches step forth and without the least ceremony fall to boxing, and with as much art as the men. The contest did not last half a minute before one gave it up; the victor received the applause of the spectors (old word) in the same manner as the men. We expressed some dislike at this part of the entertainment, this however did not prevent two others from entering the list, who seemed to be girls of spirit and would certainly have given each other a good drubbing had not two old women got up and parted them. These several contests were carried out in the midst of at least three thousand people and with the greatest good humour on all sides, though some, women as well as men must have received blows they must feel some time after...

Not one of our musical instruments, except the drum did they hold in the least esteem. In order to give them a better opinion of English amusements, I ordered a set of fireworks to be got ready and after it was dark played them off before the Chief and a great concourse of the people; some of the works were spoiled, but there was enough good to answer the end I intended, particularly some sky and water rockets which astonished and pleased them beyond measure."

Sunday 18th May, 1777 - Lifuka, Tonga - Captain James Cook.

It was that book that convinced me that to publish the letters in full was the best and most impartial way to compile the book and also has the benefit of being timeless and easy to read. When the war veterans wrote to me they did not know who I was, all they knew at the time of writing was I was interested in their views and memories. So when you're reading it feel free to replace my name for yours, as it could just as easily have been you they were writing too and the only reason I've kept the Dear Nick or Dear Mr Pringle is because it makes it clear a new contributor is about to begin.

Throughout the book I have added some extra information about various events

eg. numbers of casualties in battles, full names of abbreviations and acronyms etc. that are mentioned. (They appear in italics like this.) (If brackets appear in normal font, then the words were part of the letter.)

Well, unless you have been reading this book back to front, you have tens of thousands of words to read so I'll leave you to make a start. I hope you enjoy the book.

Nick Pringle

The Front Cover

The photo on the cover of the book is from my Grandmas album. At the very top of the stairs, amongst friends from the Green Howards, is her brother Warrant Officer II CSM Martin Durkin, who was killed in action in Sicily on Friday, 13th August 1943, aged 28. As I was growing up she would often mention him and tell me he was killed by a booby trap hanging from a lemon tree, which killed a number of men on exploding. He has no known grave but is remembered alongside 4,000 others on the columns at the British and Commonwealth War Cemetery at Monte Cassino, Italy. Here is his story and the story of some of his comrades that he fought alongside, that I have patched together with the help of a few surviving letters and information from the Green Howards Regimental Museum.

Martin, was from a large family living close to the Central Station in Newcastle Upon Tyne. His father was originally from Ballina in Co. Mayo, Ireland and came over to Newcastle for work. His mother was from Newcastle, they married in St Marys Cathedral in 1902. He was one of the middle children, close in age to my grandma. Just before signing up he had been working as a butcher according to the records at the Green Howards and joined the Army in the early 1930's, no doubt for adventure and to escape the poverty of the Great Depression era.

He was trained in signals and became part of the 1st Battalion, Green Howards. In 1938, the 1st Battalion were sent to Palestine which at the time was a British mandate. Their brief posting to Palestine was to be an eventful one.

On 14th December, 1938 on the Nablus-Tul Karm road, Lance Corporal Clarence Peacock was awarded the Military Medal after continuing to neutralise the enemy with coolness and accuracy after being wounded in the head after a bullet ricocheted off his Bren gun. He would go on to serve throughout World War Two in the 1st Battalion and was awarded the Norwegian War Cross for a fighting retreat and a Distinguished Conduct Medal for action on the Battalion's last day of fighting in Germany on 1st May, 1945 at the ferocious Battle of Buchen, ending the war a company sergeant major and one of the most decorated of Green Howards.

Lieutenant Colonel Derek A Seagrim, was also in the battalion serving in Palestine, working as an intelligence officer. In World War Two he was given command of the 7th Battalion Green Howards at El Alamein in October 1942. He would go on to win a Victoria Cross for gallantry at Mareth, after being severely wounded at the Battle of Wadi Akarit he died a few days later on the 6th April, 1943.

On the 15th March, 1939 a dramatic incident took place at Jinsafut Camp in

Nablus. A truck was burning out of control, Corporal Thomas Atkinson in charge of mechanical transport quickly organised for surrounding vehicles to be moved to safety and was badly burnt trying to save the life of one of his comrades. Meanwhile Private Thomas McAvoy close by to a burning petrol tank used an axe to pierce it, to relieve pressure and to help prevent a large explosion. In doing so he suffered burns from the jet of burning petrol that immediately rushed out. Both were awarded the George Cross for their bravery.

1939

L/Sgt M Durkin
HQ 1/Green Howards
Nablus
Palestine

Dear Agnes & Jack (My Grandparents)

Sorry to hear Jack has not been to well, but I hope by the time this arrives he is fit and well again. I had a letter from Mother and she seems very pleased with your home, and how you are shaping up as a housewife. I'm also pleased that you are both happy and getting along together. I always knew you would make someone happy except for your weak tea.

I have been very busy for the past couple of weeks. I'm now signal sgt and as the signal officer was wounded a couple of weeks ago I had to take over his work and my own. However, everything is going smoothly now. I'm trying hard to make my mind up what to do next year when my time is up. It's a difficult problem, and there's lots of ways to look at the situation. I think I have the intelligence and the knowledge to reach a very high rank, but on the other hand you are not very well settled moving from place to place, and country to country, because I would have to go to India for 6 years. I think if I got the opportunity of a decent sort of job I would probably finish, but don't relish the prospects of life on the dole or a life of hard manual toil. I don't mind working hard, but after the easy life I've led for 7 years I think it would more or less have to be head work. However, for the present I'm content to let things move along and perhaps they will settle themselves.

We leave for England on the 26th April and arrive in England on the 8th May, so it won't be long before I am home on another leave. I was in Bethlehem a couple of weeks ago and I bought you a set of rosary beads, they were blessed in the Church of the Nativity and I know you'd like them. I haven't bought anything for Jack yet, but as I'm going again I'll certainly get him something. It is hard to find anything to buy there because almost the only things you can buy are religious articles and do they sting you. I bought a lot of little things last time, and then afterwards decided who they were for. This time I'll have to take a list of the people I want things for.

Give my best to everybody and I hope Jack is better now (*Thankfully there wasn't much*

wrong with him because a year later he was called up into the Army and was on Ack Ack guns helping defend Portsmouth during the Blitz. He then became a P.T Instructor in the Army Physical Training Corps teaching silent killing in various locations and also parachutists.)
Love from Martin xxxxx

Martin returned home, and in the same year his father died. He also got married and had a baby daughter. His conundrum about whether to stay in the Army or not was decided for him when Neville Chamberlain made his famous radio broadcast on the 3rd September, 1939; "I am speaking to you from the cabinet room of 10 Downing St. This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that, unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany." These dramatic words were not only to alter the course of his life but countless others. Suddenly young men and women peacefully working in mills, car factories, attending university etc would soon be in the midst of battle on land, sea and air, and hundreds of thousands would not live to see victory and peace return.

After spending some time in France during the phoney war, the 1st Battalion were withdrawn and travelled to North Scotland and in April 1940, as part of the 15th Brigade, they sailed to Norway, to help in the attempt to slow the German invasion, that had quickly subdued southern Norway and had King Haakon, the Norwegian Army and the nation's gold reserves retreating north. They landed at Andalsnes as part of Operation Sickleforce, and were praised for their efforts in helping the Norwegian army to hold back the invasion. In central Norway the Green Howards dug in to stem the German advance along the Gudbrandsdalen. On the 28th April near a small town called Otta, the battalion faced the full fury of the Nazi blitzkrieg, with an onslaught of 200 screaming, diving Stuka bombers, as well as tanks and infantry.

With no heavy support and lightly armed they waited until the enemy were only approximately 400 metres away before starting to open fire in a disciplined and accurate manner. The German juggernaut slowed to a halt and poor morale and casualties were mentioned in their dispatches. The Howards retreated at nightfall, recognising that their efforts to slow the invasion along with the rest of the British, French and Norwegian troops was a mission impossible. They formed a rear guard action as the expeditionary forces began to evacuate. The commander of the expedition later said that the Green Howards had "fought splendidly".

Soon, Norway was to be fully occupied and Quisling put in charge, taking orders from Nazi Germany. King Haakon and his government managed to escape on HMS Glasgow and stayed in Britain for the duration of the war. This was the first time the opposing forces had clashed and it was to be a wake up call to the Allies as to how unready they were to fight. The withdrawal of forces was completed by the 8th June 1940. In total 988 British and Commonwealth servicemen lost their lives defending Norway, including Lieutenant Commander Gerard Broadmead Roope of HMS Glowworm. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, the first of the Second

World War, after he rammed his hopelessly outgunned and fatally damaged ship into the German battlecruiser, Admiral Hipper.

It was the Norwegian expedition that removed the refined English Setter like, Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister, the replacement a British Bulldog much more suited to the all out scraps that lay ahead. Winston Spencer Churchill. On the 10th of May, 1940 in the House of Commons, Leo Amery, a personal friend of Chamberlain closed his speech with a quote from Oliver Cromwell "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go."

After returning to the UK, the 1st Battalion Green Howards were soon joined by other battalions of the regiment that had escaped from Dunkirk. Now Britain stood alone with only the RAF and Royal Navy obstacles in preventing a full scale invasion. The 1st were in Galashiels, and like many members of the B.E.F reflecting on their first encounter with Germany whilst also helping on the Home Front and hoping that sooner or later they would get the chance to take the fight to the enemy. Thanks to the RAF over the skies of England, the country was saved from invasion and plans could once more be made to set sail for battle, only this time better equipped and better trained.

After spending some time in Omagh, the 1st were notified they were to sail for India on the 16th March, 1942. The troopship left Liverpool with well wishers crowding the docks 'wishing them luck as they waved goodbye' and for Martin and many others like him aboard this happy sight would be the last he would see of his country. After stopping in Freetown, West Africa for supplies, the ship as part of a convoy, dodging U-boats in the Atlantic made it's way to Cape Town, and then onto Mombassa, India. This was to be the start of a huge land journey, that earned the 15th Brigade the nickname 'The Globetrotters'.

From Mombassa to Bombay then to Pune and Ranchi. By September they were part of the Tenth Army, in Persia at Kermanshah, then December in Qum. In March 1943 they were at Kabrit, then April, May and June in Damascus, Syria. On the 5th July they were in Port Said, Egypt preparing for the invasion by sea, of Sicily 'Operation Husky' as part of the 8th Army. On the 10th July they landed in strong winds, on the eastern shores of Sicily, the first foothold in Occupied Europe. In this last month of his life Martin was commended for retrieving a radio that had been left behind, that was needed for that night's mission, going back for it through a mined cactus field in darkness.

It was on one of these night time missions during the advance on Catania that the most famous man of the 1st Battalion, Captain Hedley Verity, was mortally wounded. Before the war he was an England and Yorkshire cricketer, renowned as a prolific left arm spinner. Don Bradman, the Australian batting legend recognised him as his 'most dangerous foe'. He was leading an attack on pillboxes on a ridge, with tracer bullets and mortar fire lighting up the night sky and fire bombs setting alight the cornfields. Captain Verity on seeing so many of his men being killed urged them to stay together and to move faster to reach their target with "Keep going, keep going!" As they crept forward he was hit in the chest and stomach, but still instructed them to "keep going". The company eventually withdrew and he was seen unconscious with his

head resting on his battman's knee, the corn ablaze in the background. He was taken prisoner by the Germans and transferred into Italian hands. Shortly before his death a few days later, on the 31st July, 1943 at Caserta, lying in an Italian military hospital he is said to have declared, "I think I have played my last innings for Yorkshire." His body is buried in the Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery at Caserta.

Another Green Howard whose father hailed from Co. Mayo was Wilf Mannion. Wilf had signed for Middlesborough Football Club in 1936 and was called up for the England team in 1941 and played in a friendly against Scotland at St James Park, getting beat 3-2. He then played Scotland alongside Stanley Matthews at Hampden Park and this time England won 3-1. He had been in the Green Howards since 1940, so along with the rest in 1942, he had sailed on the troop ship to fight for his country. He was alongside Hedley Verity when he was shot. He later said, "I remember we lost half the company that day. We were pinned down all day by the enemy. Hedley was caught in the crossfire and hit in the chest. He was a wonderful man." An England international cricketer and England footballer fighting in the frontline together. Wilf fought his way up through Italy. Suffering from shell shock he was withdrawn to Cairo, where he suffered from Malaria and Jaundice. After the war he continued his football career. He played a total of 368 league and cup games for Middlesborough scoring a total of 110 goals. He was capped 26 times for England between 1946 and 1951. He scored 11 times and was part of the 1950 World Cup squad that went to Brazil. He died in 2000 aged 81.

Company Quartermaster Sergeant Tom Alder, who had won the George Cross fighting Chinese communists on the Yangtze river in 1930, was also taken prisoner in Sicily. For the rest of the war he was held in Italian and German P.O.W camps, managing to escape from an Italian camp for a brief time, before being re-captured.

The 1st Battalion were alongside other battalions of Green Howards in Sicily. At Primosole Bridge, Warrant Officer 11 CSM Stan Hollis, of the 6th battalion was recommended but was not awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Little must he of known at the time that a year later on the 6th June, 1944 his bravery would be rewarded for saving the lives of many of his men. He was to become the one and only D-Day recipient of the Victoria Cross.

Martin was killed on the 13th August in the Messina area, four days later the Battle of Sicily was over. For surviving members of the battalion, many more days of ferocious fighting lay ahead.

West Vancouver B.C
Dec 27. 1943

Dear Sister Sarah (My great grandmother)

I have your letter of Nov 10th 1943. Sorry I have delayed answering same, been so busy preparing for Xmas etc, now it is over I'll snatch this opportunity to reply to your welcome letter, am extremely sorry to hear of your illness and the unfortunate position of being bedfast. I trust that God will bless you and enable you to recover your health again (Sarah Durkin passed away two months before VE Day in 1945), you are

fortunate in having such a grand family, all doing their bit for the Allied cause of victory and lasting peace.

Your young daughter is a charming letter writer, good penmanship, it must be encouraging to you to have her beside you. I was sorry to hear of Martins death, such a fine young man, he must have been useful to his regiment to be promoted sergeant major. Yes! My wife met him before leaving England, she thought he was just grand. I hope your other two sons who were wounded in the Med will soon be alright again. My wife has been to Milan, but I don't suppose she will recognise it today after the German's finished their dirty work. From your letter, I gather you gave to the Army; Martin, John, Edward and now Leo in the Royal Marines (*After the war Leo, with both parents now dead, decided to emigrate to Canada, and for decades ran a successful family business in Toronto, well past retirement age.*) One dead, 2 wounded, quite a record.

Let us hope that this new year 1944 will see an end to it all and that peace, harmony and goodwill may prevail among the nations when the aggressors have been given their just deserts. I sent the cutting of Martins death to my son Clifford in Los Angeles, informed him it was his cousin no doubt he would be proud of him. Just had blackout lifted which was a good thing. I am in A.R.P and have all the equipment for the job, but don't think we shall be called upon to use it seriously. I sent you a small parcel of remembrance, trust you received it all right. Wishing the family a very good new year.

Your Bro Sam & Margaret

The remaining Battalion continued to push north into Italy as part of the 5th Division. They were involved in battles at Sangro river in Italy from the 19th November to the 3rd December, then at Garigliano Crossing in January, 1944. They were then sent as reinforcements to Anzio and part of the drive on Rome from the 22nd May to 4th June 1944. Following the liberation of Rome, exhausted and depleted in numbers they were sent to Palestine for some rest.

On the 24th February, 1945, they left Haifa and sailed for Marseilles, for the final push for victory in Europe. They fought their way into Germany and reached the River Elbe, where the Western Allies met up with the Soviets advancing from the east, cutting Germany in half and ensuring victory. After crossing the River Elbe at Lauenburg on the 30th April the 1st were ordered to take Penkberg Woods. Whilst advancing forward they were shelled, leaving Major Howell of A' Company seriously wounded. By nightfall they had achieved their aim and had taken 34 prisoners in the process. During the attack Lance Corporal 'Dusty' Miller, like Martin originally from Tyneside, led his section against a machine gun post, dug in behind a hedge. Three of his men were killed and two wounded. Now alone, he continued to charge the machine gunners, firing his Bren gun towards his target that was now just 40 metres away. The machine gun post was taken out of action, three of the machine gunners were killed and two were taken prisoner. For his gallantry Dusty was awarded the Military Medal.

On the 1st May, 1945 just six days before Germany surrendered 'B' Company of the 1st took heavy casualties at the battle of Beuchen, including the company commander and his second in charge. This resulted in CSM Lofty Peacock taking charge

and leading the attack. He then organised the evacuation of casualties, carrying one man on his shoulders with sniper and machine gun fire hitting the battalion throughout. As mentioned earlier, it was on this last day of fighting that he won the Distinguished Conduct Medal. For the surviving members of the 1st Battalion Green Howards, it was the end of a journey that had started in Liverpool on that spring day in 1942. They had travelled thousands of miles, faced so much danger, and left so many of their close friends behind on the long road to peace. They hadn't seen their friends and family for three years, finally they were going home.

Throughout this time countless other regiments, ships and squadrons had faced their own wars, with similar dangers, losses, bravery and victories on land, sea and air. 'The Unknown Warriors'

Dear Mr Pringle

I was so interested in your request in the Points of View in the Express from someone who served in the forces in the Second World War. To introduce myself first. I am 96 years of age and must be one of the few remaining D-Day landing boys left. I went over on D-Day with the 7th Armoured Division and the section of Desert Rats which I served and landed from sea landing craft in 3ft of water with full kit between Bayeaux and Caen.

To the left of us was the floating landing units for further landing. The landing craft next to us was torpedoed and the scream of the unfortunate will never be forgotten with the terrific gunfire etc. was like hell let loose. I am at present a war pensioner suffering from both ears with hearing aid supplied by the War Office.

During the terrific battle of the war to seize the occupation of Caen, the bodies of Germans involved and British were being run over by the tanks and bodies were thrown up onto a heap. It was a terrible onslaught and will never be forgotten. With the 7th Armoured division too many incidents to record on paper, terrible times were experienced until we captured Hamburg and the German officer came out on the British Tank to sign the Peace Treaty of Hamburg. I resigned from the forces as a Sgt in the Royal Artillery of the D-Day Desert Rats.

Now to give you some experience of my private life so that I can give you my experience of this terrible country we are left to with to live. I have previously written my points of view to the Secretary of the Express, and they never put it in the paper because it contained so much up to date truth. It is now what you are looking for, so I am going to do my best. I served for 20 years as a special constable to the rank of Sgt, 5 years as a town councillor of Ilfracombe Devon, several years as a Taunton Chairman of the various other offices, President of the I.S.C.A Boeling and have recently been elected Vice President (Emeritus)

Now my opinion of to date, is I am absolutely disgusted with the way things are turning out. There is no respect shown for people, the respect is for money not people. The terrible murders that are committed, stabbings etc. The judges that are in charge do not produce the right penalty to suit the crime, their penalty encourages the crime. Sometimes those that are imprisoned are better off in than out. I am absolutely

disappointed in the country and sometimes wonder if it was worth all the suffering of a war.

Sgt Richard Roberts

Hope you are able to understand my writing, can't give you all details.

Dear Nick Pringle

I have to say that your requests for several types of info; regarding veterans feelings, concerning the direction Britain has taken since the end of World War Two, would require a complete book. I also feel you have left it rather late in making your requests. I can tell you that from a membership of over 3,000 we now have 59 standing, some housebound.

My own experience is; The first 25 years after the war we spent building a family and their security, it then became obvious that the politicians had taken over our lives. Today in my old age, I have many, many misgivings on how matters have turned out.

Problems seem to be resolved, by more and more legislation, instead of action at the source. Our women today have been conned into going out to work, and they are still required to do most of the chores as before, except the education of children. They no longer seem to have the skills of cooking, how to discipline children, resulting in junk food (no time for cooking) over-viewing of T.V and computers. The families are no longer as close as we were. We notice on our many trips to the old battlefields how close the Italian families are. The children of today are ill dressed, scruffy, and unable to communicate. Not their fault.

What many veterans abhor, is the acceptance of homosexuality as the norm. It goes against our Christian teachings, and in our youth it was a serious offence. We went to war to defend our beloved country, our families and our faith. The introduction of the minimum wage is another failure. As once the minimum wage was legalised, it became the maximum wage, this meant all future benefits would be linked and somewhere under the minimum wage. It was a clever move to keep wages under control.

An outstanding failure has been the deliberate move by many Labour councils to ignore the history of World War Two as part of our heritage and consequently it has not been taught in many schools. Nearly all veterans want Britain to leave the E.U. We want the Royal Head of State to remain. We want taxes to be fair and not hidden.

Yours Sincerely

John Clarke MBE

The Monte Cassino Veterans Association

Dear Mr Pringle

I was in the Army in 1940 to 1946. We were called up in May 1940, a train load of us left Sheffield to go to the barracks in Pontefract to begin our training. After 6 weeks training we were ready to go to France, but our lads over there had to leave, with the help of all those little ships. (Approximately 700 little ships were part of the evacuation fleet that took part in Operation Dynamo, that crossed the channel to rescue hundreds of thousands Allied troops from Dunkirk. Most of the little ships were pleasure craft, paddle cruisers and fishing boats. The smallest was TAMZINE, that measured only 15 feet long.)

We were formed into a small unit No 6 O.B.D Ordnance Beach Detachment. We had to learn all about ammunitions. Our job was to get the ammunition over the beaches to supply the troops who landed until they got a port. We landed behind the assault troops on D-Day near Caen, Normandy. We had three tank carrier ships 200 tons on each ship, 600 tons in all.

We kept them supplied through Normandy, but we lost our captain in an explosion and our lieutenants. We had to keep going, the units didn't let the lads up front down. Then we moved through France, Belgium and Holland and into the Baltic. It was hard to see all the damage done to towns and villages, but it had to be done. I'm afraid I can't give all the details, so much happened.

I'm now 91 years of age and living on my own. I lost my wife last year after 66 years together. I'm afraid my health isn't so good, Anaemia, Arthritis, eye sight poor. I hope this letter is a bit of a help. After the war things were very hard, just a travel warrant from Osnabruck in Germany to Catterick, N.Yorks then to Hull, just a demob suit and a travel warrant. No money, it was very hard for nearly ten years, but I had met a lovely girl during 1940 in Hull. We married in 1943, and had a happy life together until she had a stroke, for ten years we struggled on.

I hope you can read this letter, my eyesight isn't very good and arthritis makes it hard to hold a pen. I'm afraid I can't write any more.

Jack Hiller
An Old Soldier

Dear Mr Pringle

I read your letter in the Solihull paper and hesitated for several days, thinking you would be inundated with replies. However, just in case my contribution would be useful, I have written a brief account of our experiences and opinions. I enclose some facts about the Kohima Battle, not many people are familiar with it, or the 'Forgotten Army'

My husband Charles was conscripted into the Army in July 1939, and demobbed in Spring 1946. He was posted to the 7th Batt. Worcs. Regt, and sent to Renton Barracks, Worcester, for basic training. He was pleased to be chosen as a despatch rider, HQ Coy (He had a motorcycle in Civvy Street). He went to France later

in 1939 and remembered that winter as being extremely cold. When the Germans invaded France some of his best mates were killed or captured, but he managed to get to Dunkirk and was rescued. For the next two years the 2nd Division was stationed in Yorkshire and the Cotswold area.

In 1942 they embarked for India. Things got bad as the Japanese got close. Fighting got very hard, he was in the 5th Inf Brigade for a while. He was at Kohima (The Battle of Kohima began in April, 1944. High in the Naga Hills of Assam in North East India a ferocious battle took place between advancing Japanese troops who planned to advance onto Delhi and British & Indian forces. For two weeks 1,500 men held some 13,000 Japanese Infantrymen off until the 2nd Division arrived to assist. In the following months some of the heaviest fighting of WW2 took place in the steep terrain surrounding the British garrison, by June the battle was won and was a turning point in the Burma Campaign. By the time the battle was over around 4,000 of the British and Indian Forces had been killed, were missing or wounded. Two Victoria Crosses were awarded, one to Lance Corporal John Pennington Harman and Bvt. Captain John Neil Randle. On the Kohima Memorial in the beautiful mountainside Commonwealth War Cemetery the famous Kohima Epitaph reads "When You Go Home, Tell Them Of Us And Say, For Their Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today") and the 7th Batt. played a big part in driving the Japs out of Burma. Some of the soldiers fighting alongside were Lancashire Fusiliers, Dorsets, and the Cameron Highlanders. He admitted that sometimes he and his mates often thought they would never get home again. He came back to England in 1945, and immediately went into hospital with a bad attack of Malaria. I was working as a nursing auxiliary in the Civil Nursing Reserve at Nuneaton Emergency Hospital. We met, fell in love, and we married in 1946.

We settled in my home village of Marston Green. Of course we had a motor-cycle, then a side car as the children came along, then a car when we had 3 children. When the Health Service started, and the Common Market life was satisfactory, everything looked hopeful, but things got worse. I think it was in the early '80's' the rot set in. We started to lose all our industry, profit and money became the only aim in life.

Immigration became a big problem to the 'man in the street'. Charles often said that his years in the Army and especially his friends lives, were wasted. He said "They stole seven years of my life and what for?" He felt that all the values of a decent, law abiding, peaceful life were disappearing, he got quite bitter about it sometimes. It is now 18 years since I lost him and as I look around parts of Birmingham today you would never know you were in England. He would have hated it.

He was also a very moral man and disliked the immoral way things were going. I do not think that people are really happy now, for all the modern easy living conveniences. Regarding pensions, I think that the pension plus the age related 'hand outs' are adequate, with a bit of common sense budgeting. Although I think it is unfair that my occupational pension company 'make up' the missing war years of the armed services, but not if one was in an essential civilian service. Nothing much is done for the veterans, the free holidays etc. came too late, most are dead now. My husband would have been too proud to apply for charity. Nothing is done for the veterans by my council, Solihull MBC. Some of the things today that I and a lot of my veteran friends

disagree with are same sex marriages, school girl mothers, rubbish TV programmes, so called celebrities, and most of all, unlimited immigration. I am very unhappy about the way this country is being transformed. I go nowhere after dark, I don't even answer my doorbell then. My husband used to say he wouldn't want to come back to this world, and that was before 1988, I fear it is much worse now.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to give you my views. I am sorry it sounds so miserable for I usually have a smile on my face. I lead a full life and have lots of good friends and family and make the best of things. It is hidden inside me that I worry about my grandchildren's future.

M Moulds

Dear Sir

I served in the Royal Navy 1941-49, first transferred to the Canadian Navy, on loan to the Canadian Government. Served on a corvette for approx two years - Atlantic Convoys. Back in the Royal Navy I spent approx three years in the Far East. I found it very difficult to adjust to Civvy Street. I was a stranger in my own country, until I met my wife.

I have been married fifty years and have been very happy. Whenever we went to a foreign country we were told to respect their ways, it was their country. All the people coming to our country should respect our ways! I support the Labour Government, who I feel are doing a very good job. I don't know what my fallen comrades would have thought. We came from different parts.

Yours Truly
A G Brend

Dear Nick

I felt I must respond to your article in the Tiverton Gazette. I retired to the West Country just over 20 years ago, but was born and brought up in the west suburbs of London. I was called up at 18 in March 1943 and served with the Royal Artillery in Normandy and onwards.

In June 1944, I landed about two weeks after D-Day at the age of 19. After the war ended, I was kept in B.O.A.R Germany (After the war, Germany was divided into zones of occupation. The Soviet Union controlled the East, The USA the South West and Britain the North West including Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia) for just over two years, as I was young and single. I didn't particularly struggle to adjust to Civvy Street, but getting married in March '48, found the biggest problem was finding somewhere to live. Unscrupulous landlords were charging what was known as 'key money' from would be tenants. No great problem in

finding work.

I think the British Legion does a good job of support for needy ex-servicemen, but government recognition and support, as far as I am aware, has been lacking. It took them 60 years to give us a veterans badge!!

As for the state of the country today, I despair of it! Discipline has long since gone out of the window along with respect for authority and other standards. My other main dissatisfactions are;- Soft sentences given to criminal offenders, coupled with the need for a stronger police force, unrestricted immigration, the ever increasing hated council tax, and hospital closures due to a 'tottering' NHS.

My wife and I often say we are glad that we are the age that we are, and she goes as far as saying that if we were younger we would emigrate!

Your Sincerely
H.C Skipper

Dear Nick

Yes I served six years for this country, for what? Three of those were in the Middle East. I shall be 90 years old in May, if I live that long, and a very bitter man. I don't even get free teeth or glasses, immigrant and asylum seekers get everything. All this country thinks about is immigration, and yobs etc.

It's a pity Hitler did not get here. I was on Anzio and saw many bodies buried. (On January 22nd 1944, Operation Shingle began. It was an amphibious allied landing at Anzio, with the aim of outflanking German forces and enable an attack on Rome. The Germans sent reinforcements and for four months the Allies struggled to break out of the beach head. There are 1,056 Allied graves at Anzio Cemetery and 2,313 at the Anzio Beach Head Cemetery. Approximately 5,500 Germans were killed in the battle. The breakout came on the 23rd May, 1944, which allowed the Allies to continue their advance towards Rome.), If I had my time over again, I would never had gone, so would many others I have spoken to.

Yours Faithfully
F Green
Gun Fitter, 31B Workshop 1st Division

Dear Nick

Letter in Dumfries & Galloway Standard - Perhaps my experience of post war Britain may be of some interest, having served in the 15th Scottish Recce Regiment from 1939-1946.

Returning home to Dumfries after six days on the beach at Dunkirk, it came as somewhat of a surprise that we were regarded as heroes instead of a defeated army. Six

years later after fighting from Normandy to the Baltic, things were very different. (On the eve of the beginning of the liberation of Europe, on the south coast of England, the regiment played cricket, and took part in running, jumping and highland dancing. Within a year, 73 men of the regiment had been killed.) Demob suit, rail warrant and 'on you go'. In the modern Army, 3 months in Iraq and you are in need of counselling.

On my return to 'normal' working life, I found it difficult to adjust and after just two weeks submitted to my employer, one months notice. After a short period, I moved from Birmingham to my home town of Dumfries. After settling down, I eventually built a successful business which I passed onto my two sons and grandson. Now at 91 years old I enjoy a happy and healthy life.

How would of my fallen comrades find post-war Britain? No doubt, like myself, the best country to live in.

Regards

Captain George R Blount MC (Military Cross)

(Field Marshal Montgomery visited the 15th division on December 13th, 1944 and presented medal ribbons, twelve to members of the regiment. He said "In this fighting no division has done better, and it is a first class show. ")

Dear Nick

Ref; Your letter in Southport Midweek Visitor. I served in the Army during World War II. I was called up in 1941 aged 19 and joined the R.A.S.C at Inkerman Barracks, Woking, where I did my square bashing etc. From there I was posted to 23RS Armoured Brigade, at Crowborough, Sussex.

I went to North Africa, via The Cape, 1942 and joined the 8th Army, El Alamein to Tunis. On completion of the Desert Campaign, we went to Malta to have our vehicles waterproofed for the landings on Sicily. From there to Italy and from there we did the landing on Greece and subsequently was involved in the Civil War. I actually spent four years on active service. My mother died a fortnight after I joined up, my father died whilst I was in North Africa. I also had a brother three years older than me, who was serving with the Royal Artillery, he was evacuated from Dunkirk and was also in the Western Desert and Italy.

I was demobbed in 1946, I had lost my home and my job. I went to live in Bedfordshire with an uncle and aunt who offered me a home and I signed on the dole and started again at 25. My original home was in Kent so getting back into Civvy Street wasn't easy, having nothing but demob pay and suit. Army discipline probably stood me in good stead. I had several jobs, my last was with General Motors, I was with them for 30 years and retired in 1980.

Regarding support for veterans, there seems to be something very wrong when some finish up living rough. After all they have risked their lives and need all the support they can get. OK, there will be malingerers, but the system should be capable of sorting them.

Regarding the way my country has turned out, I have never felt so disappointed or out of tune with society, as I am now. The 'do gooders' have a lot to answer for. Political correctness, lack of discipline, compensation madness, uncontrolled immigration, police burdened with paperwork. I served 10 years in the Specials as Sgt, no way would I volunteer now. (Mind you at 85, I'm too old.) The only time I go into town is during the day, never at night. I see bus stops vandalised, read of fights in town at night etc. If you see youngsters doing something they shouldn't and you say anything, you just get a mouthful of foul language. This is the depth to which society has sunk. It was obvious 30 years or more ago what was going to happen and was predictable.

I have often said that in many respects, I am glad I am 85 and not 18. So much of what Enoch Powell said has proved right. Unfortunately, I think there is worse to come. This is not the country I fought for. If I were younger I think I would seriously consider emigrating, sad isn't it?

Yours Sincerely

Mr J George

Dear Mr Pringle

In response to your letter in the Oldham Chronicle I thought I would respond to your appeal to ex-servicemen.

I was almost 19 years old when war was declared, and volunteered for the Royal Marines a few months after. However, it was not until January 1941 that I was enlisted at Chatham Marine Barracks. After doing my initial training there I was sent to Hayling Island for field training and assault landing practice. After a few months, I was drafted to Stobo Castle on the outskirts of Hawick in Scotland - this being the headquarters of 101 Brigade, Royal Marines. For a few months I kicked my heels acting as orderly until a notice was put on the board asking for volunteers for special duties. On applying I was sent down to Deal barracks and told if I was satisfactory I would be inducted as a member of the first Royal Marine Commando unit to be formed.

After passing various tests such as shooting, endurance, fitness, etc. during which some of the chaps were sent back to their units as unsuitable, we formed up as Royal Marines 'A' Commando and were sent up to Lochailort on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula for intensive training on the assault course and assault landing craft. On finishing this gruelling course we embarked on the assault ship, Princess Beatrice and sailed down the the coast to the Isle of Wight, where we were placed in 'civvy' billets.

In August that year (1942) we took part in the assault on Dieppe, getting our C.O and quite a number of our lads killed in the process, with others being taken prisoner. In my own case I was with my troop in an A.L.C going into land under a smoke-screen. However, on clearing the smoke, we were hit in the engine room and set on fire. The two sailors (helmsman and mechanic) were set ablaze and jumped overboard. The A.L.C being out of action and under fire, we had no option but to

abandon ship, so over the side we went. As I struck out for one of our support ships, I felt a blow on my right leg. "Oh Hell!" I thought, "I've been hit." Anyway, as I explored gingerly, I found that a spring loaded hold had slipped its catch and the lead knob on the end had hit my leg. I was eventually picked up, along with a few more of our chaps and some from No. 9 Army Commando, by the destroyer, HMS Brocklesbury and brought back to Blighty, where we slept the night on board Nelson's old flagship, Victory.

Our next big job was the invasion of Sicily, then into Italy, where I received a chunk of grenade in my leg on the Anzio beach head. We were kept busy in Italy for a while before sailing to the island of Vis, off Yugoslavia, where we stayed for a while before losing our C.O and quite a lot of men in an assault on the island of Brac. Soon after that I left the Commandos and with a few others was flown to Egypt where we formed another unit.

With regards to life after the war I cannot say I am too pleased with it. I think that what has happened since must be very much a repeat of what took place after the First World War. They were promised a 'Home fit for heroes to live in' so were we? I will say that the Labour government did well in some cases. The N.H.S was a big advance, as was the nationalisation of the railways and mines, but they were too squeamish and left the job half finished, allowing it to be picked to pieces again. In the work place, the front line, so to speak, having to fight dismissal for trumped up charges on one occasion.

My opinion of how things are now under New Labour is that they are more of a shambles than some of the actions I took part in during the war, and that is saying something. My wife receives just over £50 per week, while mine is just over £100. A year or two back when the pension was raised by the magnificent sum of 75 pence, our New Labour M.P, Phil Woolas wrote in the local paper saying how he thought it was quite a fair increase.

Finally, I think that those who never made it back with us would be appalled if they could see the world as it is today and would certainly wonder what had happened to the 'Brave New World' they fought so damned hard for.

Jack Hopley
'Y' Troop, R.M 40 Commando

Dear Mr Pringle

You would like my opinion. Born Oct 1912 South Shields. Qualified in Medicine RVI Newcastle, June 1936. On Sunday 3th September, 1936 applied to the Admiralty & volunteered my services. 1940, 6th June called up to Chatham and appointed Surg Lt for HMS Naiad on the Tyne having completed the commissioning.

Then to Scapa Flow on Northern patrol and convoy duties. February 1941 transferred to Royal Marines at Plymouth - sailed from the Clyde, to South Africa, Egypt then Sicily for the invasion of Sicily in 1943. After the successful invasion,

invalided out by air to London suffering from severe Sand Fly Fever.

Eventually appointed as Naval Health Officer, Western Approaches, Liver Buildings, Liverpool until May 1945 VE Day. Then to Plymouth to await demobilisation in January 1946. Great difficulty in finding appointment in general practice and after 6 months or so became a partner in a practice in Peterborough. Then the NHS was brought in and we were all undecided whether to join.

I decided against joining and looked for an appointment to a Local Authority as a Medical Officer of Health as I had all the necessary qualifications. In the meantime I was unemployed but did not 'sign on' (misplaced pride) and that cost me ten years free added service in the NHS as I was just over 36 years of age when I became MOH in Leicestershire in 1949.

My opinion of the country. Sadly it is not the same and has lost it's culture, character, and social cohesion. Without doubt due to uncontrolled immigration of different ethnic groups, religions and cultures and we are no longer a powerful nation when we all benefited from our close ties to each other. "All on the same side". We had discipline - no drugs or violence.

But having survived a great deal of adventure in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines I wouldn't have missed a day of it. My final rank was Surgeon Lieutenant Commander RNVR.(Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve)

Best Wishes

Name Withheld

Dear Nick

I am an old soldier of the last war, aged 87 and keeping as well as can be expected these days and lucky to be still surviving after nearly 60 years ago. My vivid memory was on docking at Liverpool, the dockers in typical English humour shouted out "Here they are, the D-Day Dodgers! All nice and warm drinking from the Cha Wallas (tea men), that and being maid on while we are shivering in Blighty!"

Ask my opinion of India for 3 years duration, it is hard to describe, but filthy seems best and to think we have allowed them to come here and stay in our country. Shame on the Government since 1997 and can't talk low enough of the men. Was stationed there for years and am sure my passed comrades would agree with me.

To sum it up I am disgusted with everything since the war and knowing all this would never have fought for my country. What I think of young ***** I can't describe. Immigration is out of control.

Called up 18/01/40. Discharged 25/11/45, Overseas to India 16/6/42

On arrival at Bombay, Deolali after few weeks was sent to Chittagong /Cox Bazaar, monsoon season to await Japs who were approaching India after Burma had surrendered, but thankfully was returned to our barracks after a few weeks. Deolali at the time was a back up post, troops being sent to different places after being kitted out

and getting used to strange food etc. However, in late 1943, our unit was sent on jungle training, courtesy of General Slim, Lord Mountbatten and General Wingate. Some of our training was done at Ranchi, near Calcutta, also other places. However, this is where the mules/ponies story begins.

Our unit was supplied with approx 30-40 mules, ponies and horses. Several of our lads were detailed to one - I fortunately was not, but very often helped out with feeding/watering and grooming. They were all extremely well fed and looked after, as we all realised that the time was coming and how much we would need their help.

After a few weeks, we first heard that word, "Chindits" being born and we would be in the thick of it very shortly! At that time, had to report at 11am for devoicing of all mules, horses etc. We all dreaded it, especially as after a time you get very attached to them, me being an animal lover!

We were taken to an open field with animals brought in one by one, first a mule which could account for all of them! Four soldiers were given short pieces of rope, approx 8ft long. Each piece was securely tied to the animals hooves and, with a loud shout the poor devil went, without a sign or struggle, so surprised, in fact, that it didn't know what to think. Should say that it took it very well.

However, next came the doctor with chloroform rag, put over the mules mouth, or it may have been an injection, I don't remember. One soldier had to sit on the mules head with a thing like a dunce's hat as soon as the doctor cut into the mules sound box. The chloroform and blood was so unbearable that the bloke on its head could only stop for a few minutes as it nearly put the soldiers to sleep; so all had to take turns. It was horrible - I took my turn!

When the operation was completed, I saw the voice box. It was like a tiny piece of jelly. Doctor put on a dressing and all told to undo our ropes and await the water man calling with his buckets. After one or two splashes the poor animal looked up, all glass eyed, struggled to his feet and tried to use its voice. I would say, with no sound coming out! The operation time was approx 10 minutes, recovery was immediate with no fatalities.

After this, the mules, horses, and ponies etc were well looked after by ourselves. Dressings changed everyday, with plenty of food and water for all. After several weeks we commenced jungle training again, loading supplies, checking girths, etc and getting prepared for you know what!

At the end of '44, the whole unit, including mules, was transported once again by lorries, to Assam Aerodrome, as it was called in those days, where loading was commenced in Dakota Aircraft.

From what I remember, 2 dozen soldiers and 3-4 mules per plane. The horses had wooden supports held by ropes and were pretty comfortable. The only thing was, during the flight they all tried kicking out with rear hooves, great strength as if to get out! However, we did manage to calm them after a time, although they did manage to split the sides a little, but landed OK. There was four airstrips made - Blackpool, White City, Broadway and Aberdeen.

Mine was the last one, very bumpy, crude landing, supplies off-loaded and taken to an area already prepared for us. Thankfully gliders were withdrawn in Assam,

due to heavy losses on landing. First night in the jungle I laid my groundsheet down and was soon asleep. However, on getting up I found a 3 foot long snake under the groundsheet! I must have laid on it all night - dead, of course!

Then we commenced march in jungle. One or two skirmishes with Japs on the way, although after a few days couldn't worry about them, as we had enough to look after ourselves! At one point we stopped at 'Indawgi Lake' for nearly a week, eating our caught fish and K rations, swimming etc. Didn't want to leave, it was like a Hollywood movie!

RAF dropped our supplies including horse/mule feed at night. One night a whole box of grenades and ammo was broken and dropped on our fire beacons. It was like firework night with no Japs around.

However, we were left to chase the Jap 'buggers', and, after several months trekking, blowing bridges, destroying communications the monsoon broke and it was hell, especially for the animals. At times we had to unload the radios/supplies and carry them ourselves up and down the large ravines as the animals could hardly walk, let alone carry anything. Lost several mules along the way - and men!

The footpaths were so flooded that, on following elephant's trails, we very often stepped in their huge tracks, causing us to overbalance. Also leeches through our bootlace holes sucking our blood. On removing our boot, we found they were about 4 inches long and had to be burnt off with a cigarette, otherwise, if the head was left in, they would turn septic.

By the time we had marched and sometimes fought our way to Mogaung/Myitayina was about as far as we could go, as we had lost a lot of our comrades along the way. We did take two prisoners, but both hanged themselves with our bandages, after we had tried to help them. We should have put a bullet through them, and saved ourselves the trouble- we had given them our food as well. Little did we know what they were doing to us just fifty miles up the road on the bridge over the River Kwai. But we did hear that the Japs had been driven back by American, Indian and British troops, so our next problem was to get out as soon as possible.

We were aware that the deadly Burma Railway was near, so the RAF very kindly dropped us an American Jeep which we found, when the tyres were removed, fitted the railway lines perfectly, travelling the opposite way to the bridge over the River Kwai- poor devils.

The only thing we needed was a goods wagon, which we soon managed to scrounge. I remember clearly, the terrific heat at the time. Must have been 100-120 degrees. In fact, we were swallowing salt tablets the size of 10p pieces to avoid passing out! The special jeep dropped had flanged wheels enabling them to run on the railway system. They had no brakes whatsoever, but apart from one or two hair raising experiences, we made it - about 30-40 soldiers on board.

Mougaung, where we were, was about 40 miles from the airstrip, and it was well worth our taking a chance. We could not bring the horses/mules out, and I am sure that they were eagerly taken by the Burmese people to help them out. In Burma the mules/horses voices returned with no problems!

After 8 weeks or so with Malaria and Dysentery, I managed to get back to

hospital in India, and consider myself very lucky to be here at 87 and able to tell this true story.

By the way, I travelled nearly all over India. Some of the places I went to were Bangalore, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Bhagalpore, Bombay, Agra, Musoorie, Poona, Dehra, Dune, Deolali and not forgetting Durban in South Africa.

Shortly after we learned of the Atom bomb on the Japs and did we give a cheer of relief! I did see a lot of pals shortly before they died and can only repeat what we have heard many times before - what a great sacrifice they all gave.

Len

(The following is part of a poem wrote by Robert Boyd MM called Behind Enemy Lines. He was in the Chindits with Len and it describes their time in the jungle.)

In the jungle a base is formed,
We hope the Japs have not been warned,
A three day rest is what we need,
Plenty of rest and a darn good feed.

A patrol moves out to look for Jap,
The course is plotted on the map,
Every man with spirits high,
Never thinking that he may die.

A shot rings out, a man drops dead,
With a Jap bullet through his head,
They jump for cover, then lay still,
Wheres this sniper they have to kill.

We rest an hour, maybe more,
Word comes through we move at four,
Wireless opened, they contact base,
Another supply drop, just in case.

Mules stand amongst the trees,
Parachutes float down in the breeze,
The boys rush out, to collect the 'K's
They may have to last us many days.

They drop us rations, they drop us mail,
'Yes' the boys of the RAF never do fail!
Over occupied Burma these lads do fly,
Through the monsoon to give us supplies.

But we are the 'Chindits', so we are told,
Daring and fearless, brave and bold.

Dear Sir,

Private 2nd Bn. Cheshire Regt. First in preparation for D-Day, then the Far Eastern theatre and finally finished going to Egypt. Civvy Street was not a hardship as I returned to my employment. My candid opinion of this country today, especially my locality, I just dare not put into words. I am still in touch with a couple of comrades who like me think the country is not for us. Was it worth fighting for? I say its a pity Hitler did not get here, with the state of the country today. Send them all back, with half of our current Government.

Take Prescott, who would employ him. He wouldn't get a job cleaning the streets, yet he is paid £130,000, lost millions in Regional Assemblies. I can remember when this council was a U.D.C and run by interested parties like shopkeepers and people who had an interest in the community. But today it is a business (Do as little as I can and bleed the buggers dry). You go to the council and if you are white you get nothing, in fact you are lucky to get in. I could not recommend my worst enemy to come to Britain to live, (England you have had it).

Name Withheld

Dear Mr Pringle

I was 15 years old when the war started, 21 when it finished and I really remember England as a 'green and pleasant land', but not any more. I was born and brought up in Essex, near Epping Forest, and recall being able to walk and have picnics there without fear for our safety, but I would'nt dream of doing it now on my visit there. I think England is now crime ridden.

Far too many immigrants who come to this country cause trouble and have no wish to integrate, but only grumble about our way of life. We have many incidents here in Lowestoft of our own yobs and slobbs causing harrasment to home owners and the police seem powerless to stop them or are disinterested in their antics. There is no discipline at home or in schools and teenagers appear to roam the streets at all hours putting many people in fear of their lives.

Oh for the England our soldiers fought for and loved, but I fear it has all gone wrong and it's too late to do anything about it. I can only say I am glad I am at the end of my life and not the beginning, but I have real worries for my granddaughter and great granddaughter as to how they will survive. One of the worst things we ever did was to join the Common Market in my opinion.

Yours faithfully

A very disgruntled Englishwoman

Dear Nick

Further to your letter in last week's Rye Observer I hope the following information may be of interest.

I was called up in January, 1940, aged almost 22, to serve in the Royal Artillery and after 3 months initial training we became part of the 2nd Searchlight Regiment R.A and spent most of the war years at various sites in the south of England, mainly in Wilts and Dorset, only going overseas in November 1944 to 'kick our heels' as part of the Army of Occupation in France, Belgium, Holland and finally, Germany until demob in April 1946. So I was one of the lucky ones, having had a comparatively cushy time in the forces, which I rose to the dizzy heights of bombardier.

My old job, in my uncle's printing firm was waiting for me and I continued in that, with various changes, for the rest of my working life. I married in December, 1949 and I have before me my P.60 for that year showing my gross salary of £451, 10s. 6d. We raised three children, had only a small mortgage for a few years and I think the only things we ever bought on the 'never, never' were the childrens's bikes. But we were always content due, no doubt, to our strong Christian faith which has been our mainstay all through life, especially four years ago when my wife sadly passed away.

I am not a 'political animal' and have little faith in politicians as a whole, especially this lot and do not agree with all the interference from Brussels. For servicemen who have been less fortunate than I have, help is always available from organisations such as the British Legion, S.S.A.F.A etc.

Since retiring at 65, over 23 years ago, I have kept active with gardening, walking, visiting family and holidays. Now that I am on my own I still try to keep busy with these and other activities, such as church, being treasurer to 3 local organisations and keeping my brain alert with the occasional crossword and sudoku. And of course , having a nap.

Yours Sincerely
Joe Rider

Dear Sir

I was very interested to read your letter in the Coventry Evening Telegraph. I think that a book that will record veterans accounts of the Second World War and their subsequent lives is of great importance. I think this because I am sure that there is a misconceived and even false impression of both the military actions of the German and Japanese wars and the living conditions and feelings of the ordinary men and women who fought them. The media appears to obtain information from either the official records or from organisations such as the British Legion. It is noticeable that when some function involving veterans is reported in the press those pictured always belong to the

British Legion. I can understand the reason that these veterans joined such an organisation is that they found some satisfying comradeship during the wars that they may wish to perpetuate. However, I doubt whether this is true of many of the conscripted people. I, therefore, think that the stories of army life given by members of the British Legion are likely to be biased. I may be wrong about this for I have not met any of these veterans or had anything to do with the Legion.

I was called up (conscripted) on 15-7-39 into the Militia when I was just 21, some months before the war actually began in 1939. After training in the Royal Artillery at Devizes, I was sent to Watchet to train for Radar and then sent to a Northern Irish Regiment in France from 19-1-40 to 17-6-40. My unit with other Radar units got out safely as the Germans advanced by driving to the south west port of St Nazaire, near Nantes. We then accompanied the Regiments anti air craft guns in Coventry, London, North England and the east coast of Scotland. We were sent to India in 1942.

We were attached to gun sites on the extreme eastern parts of India and then followed the newly built coast road running south east from the rail end at Chittagong through the jungle between Burma and India where before there had been only a few footpaths between a few small villages reached from civilization by sea. Our units purpose was mainly to protect the adjacent airfield, although we did fire at the Japanese transport using special shells fitted with contact fuses.

When the Japanese advance had been halted we left Burma, (left Akyab 9-4-45). We were then being re-equipped in Madras, we guessed for a major action when the Atom bombs were dropped on Japan, which ended the war. We were grateful for this at the time. I am sure more lives would have been lost on both sides if this bombing had not been carried out. We left India on 21-8-45 voyaging back through the Mediterranean which had re-opened after the war with Germany had ended earlier in 1945. I was eventually demobilized on 30-4-46 making a war service total of 6 years, 9 months and 15 days ending with the rank of a full Sergeant. I am now just past 88 years old.

I enclose copies of some letters that I have sent to the local paper criticising government control of our lives in the last few years. Unfortunately the Letters Editor both edits letters often rejecting vital conclusions and only printing uncomplicated messages about some current grouse such as sex shops, poor bus services or hospital parking for the disabled.

What else can we do about important fundamental factors? Write to our M.P? Join a party/vote for an anti-immigration party? All ineffective when our democratic rights only entitle us to a vote every 5 years despite the developments in speedy communication. I hope the book will help to correct what I feel are the historical inaccuracies in the media portrayal of war. A factual account with no incorrect or biased conclusions stated, as so often occurs with television historical programmes.

Yours Sincerely
C.M Barlow

Dear Mr Pringle

Your request for post war memories took me back to those self interested days, when jobs were scarce and it seemed as though you had to go 'cap in hand' to seek work. It was the time of the 'Spiv', of those in the know: of knowing where to get commodities, for everything was in short supply. The black market flourished and spivery was rife then.

Things are different now and markets overflow with goods of all kinds. Back then in Germany, 'the conquered nation' cigarettes were used as currency and you could buy all kinds of things for a packet of fags. The war was finished and masses of servicemen were clamouring to get back home, expecting a hero's welcome, only to be disappointed for there was little work to be had and no matter what experience of warfare you may have had was soon forgotten. Life had to go on.

My own short experience of war, from the Blitz on Birmingham, to the beaches of Normandy, then onto somewhere in Holland, convinced me of the madness of war. So now I write opinionated letters to the press asking for a 'Ministry of Peace' and suggesting practical ways this may be achieved. If this book can help to change the hearts of men to peace instead of war, you will not have wasted your time.

Yours Sincerely
Dick Perkins

Dear Mr Pringle

Regarding your letter in the recent edition of the Saga Magazine. I joined the Merchant Navy in 1941 at the ripe old age of 16. Between then and final victory I sailed in several ships on many seas, carrying all manner of war supplies. Several convoy trips across the North Atlantic and also North Africa.

By April 1945 I could see, as could everyone, that the war in Europe was nearing its end. On the 14th April, 1945 I married my beautiful Jean who was to be my wife for the next 57 years. I made a few short trips across the Channel to service Mulberry and later to Antwerp from Tilbury. My ship, the Fort Covington was alongside Tilbury dock when news of the German surrender came through. I think my feelings, and indeed most people, were of joy and almost disbelief that it was all over and that we had survived. After the first few days of relief and celebrations Churchill reminded us that there was still a war in the Pacific and that there was much to be done in Europe. So off I went to sea again and was in Port Elizabeth in South Africa when the Japanese surrender was announced, we set sail for the UK arriving (in Newcastle) by 10th September.

Now came 'full peace' I was still on the reserve pool of crewmen until my discharge on the 12th April 1946, two days before my first wedding anniversary. By 1946 we had grown used to peace, the euphoria was over and we had now to somehow get back to every day things, no more adventure, no more brave sacrifices. Being at sea on a fully lit ship was at first rather frightening, seeing all that light reflected off the

water we felt vulnerable after years on darkened ships when there was a chance that someone was out there with glasses trained on you and torpedoes being made ready.

The war was over and we had promised ourselves that after years of sacrifice, danger, rationing and restrictions we would eat, drink and be happy for ever after, we thought we had earned that. It was not to be, the shortages and restrictions were as bad if not worse in peace as they had been in war. Only the blackout and the danger were lifted. The general feeling was that if this was winning the war, was it worth it. There had been a reason for all the sacrifices and restriction, we could'nt see the reason for them now that the enemy was defeated. I suppose we were naive in thinking that with peace would come an almost instant lifting of the great oppressive weight that we had borne for so long.

Restrictions on almost every aspect of daily life seemed to become worse. Many of us believed that this was to provide jobs for the many civil servants in the departments that had sprung up and that petty bureaucracy had become a habit. During the war there had always been the thought, often expressed 'When the war is over' light at the end of the tunnel, now in peace who could say when and how things would get better. The light in the tunnel turned out to be a train coming in the opposite direction. It wasn't for another eight years before things did begin to look up, starting with the coronation of the Queen. I don't believe that the population of Great Britain that went through the war have ever received the rewards they deserved.

As for today, this is not the country that people of my generation risked all for. I know all about Uncle Albert Trotter (From the BBC comedy, Only Fools and Horses) and his war stories. I think it is very sad that our heroes should be at best treated as jokes, at worst reviled. These days the slightest discomfort or difficulty is met with counselling and possibly litigation. The young must not be punished for doing wrong but rewarded when they manage to refrain from wrong doing. Our elected Parliament is hamstrung by rules and regulations dreamt up by unelected bureaucrats in Belgium. Patriotism is a dirty word. I doubt if anyone in public life would dare to quote Shakespeare's 'This England', though he could probably sing 'America' to applause from his peers.

Those who gave their lives during the war gave them for 'King and Country' as any war memorial will tell you. Now the country seems to have become an offshore island of a Europe, where France and Germany hold sway, it's so ironic. I may sound like a bitter old man, I'm not really, it's only when I sit and think about those times and the World as it is today that I feel somewhat let down. I'm sorry if this tirade is not what you wanted but at least I have enjoyed getting it off my chest.

Your Sincerely

Frank Wernham

Sir,

I am writing in reply to your published letter in the Stockport Times.

During the war I served in the Voluntary Nursing Reserve, at the Manchester Royal Infirmary, so have a good idea how things have changed since then - cleanliness and patients comfort was paramount, and all the staff really cared in spite of the air raids, often working through the night if needed. There isn't the dedication now.

The younger people of today, have no respect for anyone, especially the old. They do not realise the sacrifices we made of our young lives. We brought up children up without family allowances etc. Our young men were in the forces, not roaming the streets causing mayhem as they do today. We never knew if we would be killed in an air raid, so had roll calls in places of work to publish who was missing. We did not know where our men were either. My husband was on the Ark Royal, so I never knew, until he had leave. We only had 48 hours leave to get married, he had to rejoin the ship.

Many of our ailments are due to the war and the stress, but we don't complain and look around for someone to 'sue'! We oldies are disgusted at the way our country has deteriorated, it is no longer 'safe in our hands'. We feel that we are foreigners in our towns and cities. It is no longer a 'country fit for heroes'. We've been thrown on the scrap heap. Our pensions which we paid in for all our lives are given free to all and sundry. If there was a war tomorrow I wonder how many conscientious objectors there would be?

I am afraid Mr Churchill (and Nelson) would turn in his grave. We feel all our war efforts were for nothing.

Disillusioned
D. Wade

Dear Mr Pringle

I am not a member of any political party and would describe myself as an 'English Independent'. I served in the Army, in the D.L.I (Durham Light Infantry) for about 4 years. I was overseas for 3 1/2 years in Italy and Austria. Upon demob I served a further 4 years in the T.A (REME). The dumbing down of public opinion continues into most debates involving race and ethnic religions. These subjects are not for discussion by ordinary people. Government ministers, police chiefs, community leaders, and race relation overlords seem to be the sole arbiters of these subjects. Anyone disagreeing with their 'overview' is immediately classed as 'rabble rousing', 'Little Englanders' or racist and very definitely not politically correct. Our British culture is draining away at an ever increasing pace and we are almost forbidden to make any comment.

It is time to be completely pragmatic and acknowledge that too many of our politicians of all parties are corrupt beyond redemption. Not only have the norms of decency diminished, but sadly, also the nurtured probity and inherent patriotism, once expected of all M.Ps. Like most of my generation I fail to understand what motivates the current leader of the Conservative party. Hug a hooded 'mugger'! Forget you once fought for your country and change your perspective to accommodate the madness that

this leader espouses! New Labour 'sold' the British people the idea of a 'sleaze' free government based on the principles and honesty. Sadly we have known only liars, incompetents, and self aggrandizing charlatans, at the head of the nation's affairs.

So far as I can recall no-one voted for or requested ethnic or cultural changes to our society, so who precisely benefits by allowing hundreds of thousands (or even millions) of people, about who we know nothing to enter our country.

Why do our political elite insist in thwarting the will of the majority of voters by recommending ever closer union. What is demonstrated is a traitorous desire to permit foreigners to have a say in how Britain is governed. It is even suggested that this would be in our best interests. Never in the history of our island has it been less than traitorous to suggest that foreigners govern us.

Regards
Mr V Turner

Nick,

Very interested in your letter in the Rhyl Prestatyn Visitor. As I am approaching 89 my mind may not be as good as it was. On 12th December 1939 called to 55 West Lancs Div (Red Rose) posted to Egypt. Lost my unit due to illness, posted to the 50th TT Division in the 8th Army. After Sicily affair brought home for D-Day, but went on teleprinter and wireless course, passed and went to India. Back home to Colwyn Bay, very unsettled no counselling at all, 88 days leave. Others no job to go to. As I was a trained railway telegraphist I could go back to LMS, my colleagues had no such luck. My old pals have now passed on, I've often wondered what happened to the 50th Div, was told they could have been wiped out on Sword or Gold beach. (At 07:25 the Division landed on Gold Beach and suffered 400 casualties securing the beachhead, by midnight 24,970 men had landed and penetrated 6 miles into occupied France.)
THOUGHTS 1950-2006

I begin with Maggie Thatcher - she hated the working man. Ruined the railways. Brought the coal miners on their knees. Told councils to sell council houses to tenants but forbid them to rebuild. No wonder people want to be an M.P. Subsidised meals and drinks, expenses galore, good stipend, 2nd homes. Jack Straw announced the summer recess for 2007 would be 17 weeks.

The prisons are full - 3 good meals a day - TV - pocket money to spend in the prison tuck shop. No wonder they are bulging. The thought of Brown as P.M fills me with horror. Look what hes already done to OAP pensions. I feel for the teachers who only have to touch a pupil and they are charged with assault.

I end with the E.U. For many years I grew an F1 tomato from a seed company. One year it didn't appear in the cat, so I wrote to them. They replied that Brussels had stopped them being sold along with many other varieties. Why? Why?

Best of luck
Stan

Dear Mr Pringle

With regards to your letter in the Argos, asking for opinions from service people as regards life since the end of the war.

I served in the RAF as a tradesmen from April 1941 to October 1946. I spent a total of 4 years abroad, 2 3/4 years in Egypt, 3 months in Italy and 12 months in Burma.

THE FLIGHT TO BURMA

By February 1945 I only had a year left of overseas service but still had plenty of adventure left in me. Despite the advice 'never volunteer', I just couldn't help myself especially when a great opportunity to travel more came my way. I had heard that the Dakota squadron, based on the other side of the airfield, were making a move to the Far East so I promptly took myself to their orderly room. I was told to report for take off 18.00hrs the following day.

So after a quick goodbye to the lads at 18.00 hrs I reported to 267 Squadron and was allocated to an aircraft. It was an overloaded plane with just enough room for us to squeeze behind the cockpit, most of the crew were already on board and so we were soon taxied ready for take off. We headed south out of Bari, over the quarry where all the debris from aircraft, victim to crashes, were hidden. Luckily it was very dark so we were spared the sight.

After a short trip to Malta we landed in El Adem for a welcome breakfast. This was almost like a homecoming after spending nearly 3 years in the Middle East. We were quickly back in the sky flying towards the east, to our destination - Kilo 26 Cairo West. What a view with the pyramids visible in the distance. Our aircraft was to stay for several days but we were kept busy with the odd servicing that passed through. My old unit happened to be up the road so I thought a trip to say hello was in order. So on the third day I hitched up a lift to see them. We spent the time having a chinwag. I was made very welcome so decided to stay until the morning, catching the ration wagon hoping they had not gone without me.

Another two airmen had been added so we had less room than before, and we were even more cramped. It wasn't long before we left. We had an enjoyable journey. Cairo was all lit up which was certainly a sight. Towards dawn I headed up to the cockpit and we spotted a large plane about 500ft in, heading in our direction. It was a Sunderland and it passed us so close we were able to wave to each other. It looked rather incongruous flying over the desert. Soon Habbanya (Iraq) was on the horizon and we landed in time for a welcome breakfast.

On looking around we were all struck by the apparent peace time atmosphere. The whole area was clean and tidy, with all personnel spick and span in neatly pressed khaki drill. Our presence was marked by stares - we still wore our shabby khaki battle dress with a few added adornments. During our breakfast the orderly officer and sergeant, extremely neatly dressed including white knees, came along to ask the usual "any complaints?". We had to say who we were and give an explanation as to why we were not so neatly dressed. Being the only corporal all eyes fell on me so I answered, we

were RAF and we had just come from a war and we were on our way to another one in Burma, hence the battle dress. The sergeant sighed and then went on to mention as I was a corporal I should be sitting at a different table. This resulted in a coughing fit from the lads mentioning that such a luxury was not usual in our circumstances. The sergeant and officer turned quickly and marched away, both with a look of disgust leaving us to enjoy our breakfast. After an eventful meal we went back to our plane for take-off to the east.

From Habbanya we flew east to Bahrain landing late afternoon. After a meal with several other aircraft crews we noticed some American planes 'Curtis commandos' coming into land. It was then announced that a show would be given at 20:00hrs by none other than the Glen Miller band. The concert was held on the sand, under the stars and moonlight. It proved in RAF parlance to be 'a truly wizard show'. It lasted for 2 hours and I can still visualise the scene on hearing any Glen Miller music.

Our aircraft needed nothing doing to it so we were back on our journey again by mid morning the next day. We covered more desert area and soon landed in Karachi. This was ideal for most of us and the thought of discarding the battle dress and donning the khaki drill and feeling warm pleased me. This was only another overnight stop and we were on our way to Bilaspur in no time. Bilaspur was not far from Calcutta. It was a melting pot of old and new ground crew. It was also the place for the forming up of the squadron. It was a week of intense activity and hard work. The instrument section now had a couple of sergeants, straight from technical school, three corporals and eight airmen. The sergeants having not worked on aircraft before couldn't contribute much so it was down to the three corporals to head up the repairs and maintenance work. The actual camp was fairly comfortable with accommodation in bashas (huts) complete with charpoys (beds). It seemed to be a new drome that had possibly been built in case the Japanese had moved westward.

Whilst at Bilaspur everyday we were inundated with Indian school children on trips with their teachers as they had never seen an aircraft close up. They also had never seen Englishmen close up either. We learned that some of the children had walked up to 40 miles to visit us. After a week the squadron started to move on Imphale, Assam and so once again we were on an overloaded aircraft flying east. This time we were to start our real work. We were to start dropping supplies and flying out the wounded, but that is the start of another story.

I found it very difficult to readjust to civilian life. Firstly civilians and I were a world apart, they had no idea of our experiences. Work was very difficult to explain. I married soon after my demob. I managed to sustain myself, wife and child through great hardship for many years but it was a struggle.

I am now retired and in my 80's. It is very sad to see this country being run and taken over by foreigners who have no right or business to be here at all. Successive governments have literally 'sold us up the river'. Being an Englishman it is galling to feel that I and thousands of dead and living service personnel feel badly let down whilst this country is pandering to the so called refugees and immigrants who take advantage of benefits, which we have earned and paid for in our taxes.

Our children are not taught our true history or our Christian heritage, which is being withered away. It is disappointing that we have a government of 'wimps and twits' (I could use stronger language). Many of my age group and many younger people I have talked to are very angry that all we fought for is being whittled down to accommodate people, who have their own country and customs, and who come here to tell us what to do. It is time to call a halt before there is serious civil unrest on a large scale.

Yours Faithfully
D.G Hull

Dear Nick

1939-41 Worked locally keeping accounts for local Butcher's

1941 - Government call up for 19 yr olds. Volunteered ASAP for W.R.N.S at that time you could opt as volunteer for service locally. I had an interview and accepted to enter W.R.N.S at Falmouth. Shortly afterwards Father lost his life and unknown to me I was delegated to work at G.P.O Truro to train as a teleprinter operator.

Later 1943 - Mental breakdown after husband was killed in the General Sikorski so called 'accident' later known as Sabotage.

(General Sikorski was the wartime leader of the Free Polish Government in exile in London. He died in an air crash after taking off from Gibraltar on the evening of 4 July 1943. The General and his entourage were returning to London after a tour of Polish Forces in the Middle East. The RAF Liberator from Transport Command, crashed into the sea shortly after take off, killing the 25 people aboard, the pilot being the only survivor. The General's death came at a time of tension between the Polish Government in exile and the Soviet Union, following the discovery of the Katyn mass graves. Up to 22,000 Polish military officers, policemen and civilian prisoners of war had been executed in a forest by the Soviets . Allegations of sabotage by different parties, of the General's aircraft including Soviet or British Intelligence or opposition Poles for various strategic reasons persisted for many years following the incident. Although it is still officially recorded as an accident, conspiracy theories continue to this day.) Sent later to work on various local projects ie. egg packing, shop work etc. Sent to work painting chassis's of military lorries being repaired. All khaki paint, three layers, undercoat, camouflage spraying done by men only. Early spring 1944 sent to work with three others to run a telephone switchboard at U.S Army 14th Field Hospital on the outskirts of Truro. Mostly this was in large Nissan Huts. We were given officer status, as were all the nurses. Finished on 24hrs notice after D-Day.

1951 - Employed by Cornwall Education Service until retirement.

All of this may be of no interest, but sorry, did not have the life I had envisaged and hoped for.

Sarah

Dear Sir

Having read your article in the local paper, I thought I would put pen to paper to give you my views. I am a war veteran, served in the RAF for 6 years.

During my service life, I was posted to; Outer Hebrides, India, Ceylon, Singapore and finished in Japan in 1945 with the Occupation Forces, so I saw many countries, demobbed in 1946 and worked until my retirement at 65. I am now 83 years old. I lost a brother serving in the 8th Army and is buried out in Italy, which I have visited many times with the British Legion. The cemetery has nearly 3,000 servicemen of all denominations.

I often look back over the years and am sorry to say Great Britain has deteriorated in many ways. We are great no longer. Our work has gone and a lot of the young ones are encouraged to live on state benefit, illegal immigrants coming in and living off the state, our pension doesn't rise very much and our culture seems to be taken away from us. I am sorry to state my views this way and to know the numbers of people who were killed and suffered during the two wars. Even this day, our troops have to endure the hardship of other countries, our politicians of all parties only look after themselves. We should welcome immigration, but when people come to live in our country they should abide to our culture.

Yours Truly

Name Withheld.

Leading Aircraftsman

Dear Nick

Couldn't resist replying to your letter in Southport Visitor. Although in a reserved occupation from 1940, when I joined the LDV/Home Guard at about my 16th birthday. I was desperate to join up. I soon learned that I had defective colour perception and for a while it seemed as if nobody wanted me.

Acting on impulse one day, I tried the Royal Marines and soon learned that they were willing to stretch the rules and I was accepted, but was conned into signing on as a regular (12 year engagement) with the airy promise that I wouldn't have any trouble getting out after the war.

Joining in Aug '42 I underwent 10 months training. Our training, of course included all the naval elements including naval gunnery, fire-fighting and in my case 6 weeks MMG.

I had just finished training and I quickly learned that my first assignment was code named 'Party Med'. We took off from Plymouth by rail (not having a clue where we were going) 5 Aug '43 and arrived at Gourock Docks. Loaded into a launch and headed for, what turned out to be the Queen Mary. Accommodated in what was

normally the library. Sailed that evening still in the dark.

Next morning the detachment, about 24 strong, were fell in being briefed on our task and it had hardly started when Mr and Mrs Churchill and some of his party approached and acknowledged the salute from our O.C.A Major, who was also the Adjutant, RM Barracks, Plymouth. During the trip to Halifax we were Orderlies to various Senior Officers, including the P.M, Lord Portal (Air Marshall) and Admiral Power (C in C).

On arriving in Halifax we entrained in a Canadian National Railway train for Quebec. I seem to recollect it took about 36 hours. We escorted the P.M and his entourage to the Chateau Frontenac where they were to be accommodated and where some of the conferences were held. We were then taken to the Citadel, an old castle being used as a barracks for the Canadian Army, the R.C.M.P and us.

Our duties were quite varied from being guards, couriers, orderlies, some of which was done by watchkeeping, four on, four off. One of my jobs was to escort General Wingate (of Chindit fame) to Montreal Airport to return to the UK. Another one was to make my first ever flight from Quebec to Fredericton, taking documents and briefs for the PM by rv with his train returning from the USA, where he had been with President Roosevelt.

A large part of the PM's entourage returned home after about four weeks in the Queen Mary. I and a couple of L/Cpls remained behind with the PM and a few of his senior officers, finally leaving about mid September embarking in HMS Renown for the return trip and escorting the PM back to No.10 (My only visit) and finally returning to Stonehouse Barracks, whereupon, before I actually entered the building the CSM shouted to me as he cycled past "Do not unpack Ware!" On reaching the Coy Office he told me I had a draft to HMS Renown. When I said "I've just left it," he said "You're just going back lad." The only time I ever got one over him was when I told him was when I told him that the PM had given all the detachment a weeks leave.

I did join Renown, 16 Oct and one of the ship's first jobs was to sail to Plymouth and pick up the PM and party to take him to Alexander en route to Tehran for another conference. We stopped in Malta for a couple of days when the PM did an island tour to thank the Maltese people for sticking it out in spite of continuous air raids and severe food shortages. After a re-fit at Rosyth, we sailed for the East Indies on HMS Renown, which became Flagship, East Indies Fleet based at Trincomalee, Ceylon.

We carried out attacks on the Burma coast and the various islands in and near Burma and as far south as Sumatra. With the war in Europe coming to an end, the Renown was ordered home, being replaced by more modern ships. I was kicked off and soon found myself in Southern Burma with a provost unit, with a wide range of duties until a few weeks after the war, when after numerous delays I was on the way home and on to foreign service leave. Got married and went back to see about getting out and resuming my engineering career.

Turned down flat. However, seemed to take it in my stride and served until Dec, 1977 largely in administrative appointments. I ended up doing 35 years. Awarded the British Empire Medal in Jan 1962, whilst in 41 Commando. I also spent nearly three years in 40 Commando in Malta and Cyprus (Eoka).

On becoming a Civvy, I was totally shocked by almost every avenue of life. The hypocrisy of our politicians at every level is staggering, our services at every level a disgrace. Management apparently immune from responsibility or accountability. I now realise how responsible and correct we were in HM Forces.

Yours Sincerely
Alan Ware

Dear Nick Pringle

Yes! I was in the ATS for six years 1940-46. I received the princely sum of nine shillings per week (45p to you). When I got to pension age it was rather more than that, but only very recently has it increased to an amount on which one can live comfortably; The so called pension credit, Take it! It's yours!

So I'm still proud to be British and think the government have repaid me sufficiently for my six years service.

Your Sincerely or perhaps

I have the honour to be,

Your obedient servant...

L/Cpl (acting unpaid)

Cordelia Stamp

(Mrs Stamp sent a copy of her own book ISBN 0905355598 where she has carefully recorded all the names on memorials, military gravestones etc in the Whitby area of North Yorkshire, interspersed with poetry and images. A reminder that although the term Unknown Warriors was used by Churchill in 1940, the Great War of 1914-18 was the war that gave us the original Unknown Warrior, whose unidentified body was brought from France and buried in Westminster Abbey on November 11th, 1920. A black marble slab from Belgium was placed over the top with the following inscription composed by Herbert Ryle, who was Dean of Westminster at the time.

BENEATH THIS STONE RESTS THE BODY
OF A BRITISH WARRIOR
UNKNOWN BY NAME OR RANK
BROUGHT FROM FRANCE TO LIE AMONG
THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS OF THE LAND
AND BURIED HERE ON ARMISTICE DAY
11 NOV: 1920, IN THE PRESENCE OF
HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V
HIS MINISTERS OF STATE
THE CHIEFS OF HIS FORCES
AND A VAST CONCOURSE OF THE NATION

THUS ARE COMMEMORATED THE MANY

MULTITUDES WHO DURING THE GREAT
WAR OF 1914-1918 GAVE THE MOST THAT
MAN CAN GIVE LIFE ITSELF
FOR GOD
FOR KING AND COUNTRY
FOR LOVED ONES HOME AND EMPIRE
FOR THE SACRED CAUSE OF JUSTICE AND
THE FREEDOM OF THE WORLD

THEY BURIED HIM AMONG THE KINGS BECAUSE HE
HAD DONE GOOD TOWARD GOD AND TOWARD
HIS HOUSE

Here are two entries Mrs Stamp found in a Church memorial book;
FRED HODGSON (1899-1918) England had sons in their teens who were animated by strong desire to 'do their bit' without delay. They wouldn't be put off. This was one of them. He joined up before his eighteenth birthday.... He was one of the bright and promising boys at Danby School. His service with the forces was soon cut short. He died from shell gas poisoning. A STAR LOST IN THE DAWN.
COLIN COLBORNE CRAGGS (1888-1916) He was last seen alive on the edge of a crater at the Battle of the Somme. Out of eight-hundred of the battalion who went into action only thirty came back to the English lines. Among the brave men Craggs was proud to be numbered.)

Dear Mr Pringle

You were asking for memories and opinions from war veterans. I'm afraid my own offering won't go far towards your proposed book but theres not a lot to say about the transition from army to civilian life - and it's a long time ago. The country and its inhabitants have changed beyond belief.

Regards

NAME WITHHELD

Dear Mr Pringle

This can only be a brief summary of what occurred sixty years ago; and recalled now when one's memory is distinctly faulty it may be more fictional than factual.

I served in the army from December 1939 to May 1946, initially as a driver with an R.A.S.C (Royal Army Service Corps - now none existent) training battalion. Then I was doing clerical work as a member of permanent staff until mid 1941 when I decided that I wanted to see what the war was about, (silly me) and was eventually posted abroad as a wireless mechanic to a base camp in Egypt. From there I joined an

armoured brigade at Alamein and continued as such through the desert campaign, invasions of Sicily and Italy and finished up with the equally perilous activities of the Greek Resistance, which no one knows about (viz fighting the Greeks.)

As far as I can recall, the transition from the army back to civvy st was rather a sad occasion - leavings ones mates with whom you had been sharing the ups and downs of wartime army life, and having to adjust to family life which was quite different and much more restricting. I certainly had to watch my language, and I found it difficult to relate to girls when I returned to work in the civil service. Civilian life was all rather lame- and then I was six years older but my father still treated me as if I was a boy and would say things like "You were a bit late coming home last night." He couldn't get used to the idea that I had changed and actually went out drinking in pubs, and smoked cigarettes, activities which I'd picked up after a few months in the army.

Anyway, it took a while to adapt to civilian life but fortunately I met up with other ex service colleagues, men and women at work, so a little group of us went around together, had holidays together; and everyone had wartime experiences to talk about. Eventually the army faded away as all things in life do. I kept in touch with half a dozen army mates but now there are only two and one of those is in a home. That is one of the saddest aspects of spending ones youth in the forces - ones close friends become only distant friends living too far away to maintain a close relationship.

I could write a book about what I think of life in the UK today, but will settle for saying that it's not a place I recognise, and I don't really belong in it today. I am fortunate in living in area which has not yet been overrun with immigrants, and in recent years we have had no criminal activity in the neighbourhood (but I've had four break-ins in the past.) We never see a policeman (who does?) as we always did when I was young. The present government appears to have no feelings of patriotism or tradition and you feel at times that professing to be a Christian and English - and heterosexual is a criminal offence. The current national activities seem to be sex, drinking, vandalism and violence. And watching the interminable football of course. Few people appear to be capable of speaking English judging by what you hear on television and respect and service are just echoes from the past.

Name withheld

Dear Mr Pringle

In response to your letter in our local paper regarding how 'us lot' settled down after service in World War 2. I was born in 1923 on the 3rd Oct (which makes me now 83 years old, I hope) and was conscripted to the army in 1942 at 18 years of age and demobbed in 1947 having almost exactly five years service. (Roy was conscripted into the 15/19 King's Royal Hussars. He then served in the Tank Transport Regiment, which conveyed Churchills, Shermans, Centaurs and Centurions to the heart of battle following D-Day. He was at the Battle of Bulge in 1944 and was in Brussels on VE Day and witnessed the crowds celebrating on the day of liberation. At the end of the war he

was posted to Palestine and was stationed close to St Davids Hotel when it was bombed by Jewish guerillas killing hundreds. They viewed the British as an obstacle to achieving a permanent homeland. Compared to the World War Roy found it very different as you couldn't see the enemy and they were stuck between two opposing groups. He was demobbed in 1947.)

My opinion of this country nowadays, well when asked I invariably quote Enoch Powell when, in 1968 on immigration, he said "The streets will be rivers of blood". How apposite, what with primitive cultures flooding our societies and our leaders apologising for the slightest reason. Not what we wanted or expected in those old days. If it were not for family ties I'm sure my wife and I would have emigrated ourselves long ago. Incidentally, my wife; and we have been married for 56 years, is now disabled so I have to look after her. Well I must sign off now.

Cheers

Roy

Dear Mr Pringle

I refer to your letter 'War Days' in the Solihull Times. I have to inform you that I enlisted in the Territorial Army in early 1939. You may be interested to know that in the spring of 1941, I served in an AA (Anti Aircraft) unit near South Shields when I was accepted by the RAF for pilot training. I was awarded 'my wings' as a sergeant pilot in April 1942 after which I became a flying instructor, teaching army personnel to fly on powered aircraft before they transferred to gliders.

I was commissioned as a pilot officer in May 1943 and shortly afterwards, I volunteered to join Bomber Command. Following crew training on the Wellington and Stirling aircraft, I joined 619 Squadron, 5 Group, Bomber Command as a Lancaster pilot. I was stationed at RAF Strubby, a bomber airfield 5 miles south west of Mablethorpe, a seaside resort on the east coast of Lincolnshire.

I took part in three 1,000 bomber raids on Dusseldorf, Dortmund and Essen and the well publicised operation to Dresden on 13/14 February 1945. I completed my tour of 30 operations at the end of which I was awarded the DFC. (Distinguished Flying Cross) I was demobilised as a flight lieutenant in June 1946, I am currently aged 88. Whilst veterans of the Second World War can obtain support from the Royal Naval Association, the Royal British Legion and the Royal Air Force Association, the help they obtain is limited. I feel that the government could do more to bridge that gap.

Since the end of the war, I believe that there has been a steady but noticeable decline in the standard of behaviour in this country. As we enter the 21st century, I am appalled at the lack of respect for the police, the steady increase in the crime wave in the use of knives and fire-arms and the easy acquisition of drugs. I have yet to be convinced that the extension of the drinking hours has not led to binge drinking. As a life long no

smoker, bearing in mind the proven medical consequences of smoking, I am very disappointed to see many young people 'lighting up'. I am dismayed at the attitude of members of the the public who feel that they have a right to deposit their used chewing gum on the pavement, imposing an unnecessary expenditure on local authorities who have to clear up the mess. The flouting of the law by motorists who drink and drive or who use mobile phones whilst driving is a concern of all law-abiding citizens.

Your Sincerely
JL Whiteley

Dear Mr Pringle

I read your letter in the Burton Daily Mail. It's good to know that someone is interested enough to write a book about WW2. There can't be many of us left now, who were actually there. I was in the WLA 'Womens Land Army' during the war. I had two sisters and they were both in the ATS and I didn't fancy that. So one day after work I went and joined the WLA and went home to tell my parents.

I was living in a hostel at first. That was an eye opener, with girls from all over the country from all types of backgrounds. Every day we went out to a farm and were picked up in a little van and dropped off. After a while I went and lived in on a general farm; cows, general field work etc. I never thought I'd milk a cow, but I did! I was treated very well. The farm was run by a middle aged couple, they had no children and I was treated like one of the family. One young boy about 16 thought I was a great joke and he pushed a mouse down the back of my neck. I was terrified, but I pretended I wasn't bothered. We were a bit of a joke to the locals. We used to get a lot of remarks.

We had local dances at Wem in Shropshire and went dancing with the Yanks. There was a camp near the farm. We had overalls for work and the uniform was riding breeches, shirt and green jumper. We were the Cinderella of the services as we weren't taken to seriously at first, but it allowed the men to join up in the services. We were last to be recognised by the Government.

I am now in my '80's' a mother, grandmother and widow. Although it was a brief time, 3 years - it changed my life completely.

Mrs Pallett

Dear Mr Pringle

Your query in what our generation would think of Britain in 2006 can be summed up in three words - "Not a lot". I can't imagine what the young men who died in their thousands would think either. My husband served in the 7th Armoured then the 11th abroad except for 9 months training after being called up. He was paid 14 Shillings a week in our money of which he had to send 7 to his mother.

Whilst I never agreed with sending our boys out to Iraq, compared to the conditions in 1940 troops had to put up with, it's not in the same league. We didn't receive any letters unless they were censored & it was just a telegram to the door if it was to say the person had died, or missing, or a prisoner.

The difference then was we helped them in anyway we could. The majority of the young people have no respect for themselves or anyone else. What can you expect when there is no way anyone is allowed to discipline anyone today or as a Christian country speak our minds so not to offend anyone. Jails are like holiday camps & you get more money by staying home than working.

I was called up to do factory work, repairing and inspecting aeroplanes who had to be overhauled after so many flying hours or had crashed. The worst ones were the ones that had come down in the sea. I saw what I thought was seaweed but found out it was a piece of helmet. My pay for a 12 hr shift because I was under 21 was £1.33 gradually rising to £5 when pay as you earn came in. I left for work at 6.30am and was lucky to get home at 9.30pm owing to having to change trains. We worked on a rota system for our days off. The train station was in a lonely place and was in total blackout. We had mountain ponies who would stray down looking for food and sleep. Can you imagine how scary it was when suddenly one would cough or start to run, but we did it because we had to.

I'm 84 so I also saw what it was like in the 30's but we helped our parents and listened to them. My mother died 30 years ago and my father 22 years ago and I would never speak to them like young children do today. On the plus side the young men respected us and we respected ourselves. Also children could play outdoors in safety. We made our own fun as we had no pocket money like the children of today. I'm afraid it's a "I want it now" era and the word no has lost its meaning. Everyone must have everything on taps.

Yours
Mrs Nancy Fryer

Dear Sir

In response to your 'open' letter to the Oldham Chronicle. My unremarkable service details are as follows. Joined the RAF early 1941, after training went to Fighter Command, 64 Squadron, Spitfires. Later transferred to Bomber Command, servicing Stirlings, Manchesters and Lancasters. I was an A/C Engine Fitter. As the bombing became less intense, was transferred to Fleet Air Arm, destined for Japan but the atom bomb put paid to that. Became a civilian in 1946.

Certainly had to fend for oneself from the very beginning, had my job to return to, but no houses of any kind. Always owned my own properties, tough times but have been so very fortunate, happily married for nearly 60 years, two great sons and three grandsons.

I am most disappointed with my country, in particular this area. As for my

fallen comrades I quote Phillip Nicholson's last lines of his poem, "Faces Glimpsed and Never Seen Again."

Dispatched with indignity
And without preparation.
I mourned them then,
But now surviving in a world
Indifferent to their hopes and dreams,
I grieve more for the living.

I reckon the dead and injured got a raw deal indeed, I will never forget the one's I knew.

I tread dangerous ground now, so it may not be politically correct, but here we go. Local born seem to have a very low priority in the scheme of things in all matters. This is an old cotton mill town and not very 'up-market' in many ways, so not enough noise has come from the people outrageously ignored.

Some sections cannot ask for too much. We are surrounded by five bedroom new builds, they are now beginning on seven bedroom properties. The media seem to be 'politically correct' in all they report, it worries me. The so called 'riots' being a case in point. If they were spontaneous, how come some had petrol bombs all primed and ready from the start, and all the pubs in the affected area were fire bombed?

I could never have afforded a five bedroom house and paying my rates each month (not subsidised) the rents being paid are laughable. Happily my family have left the district, soon only the aged will be left, then it will be taken over completely. I do not vote any more because I cannot support the views of the 'new faces' representing my political persuasion. I have been very restrained, believe me.

Yours Faithfully

Name Withheld

p.s I forgot to say I am 85

Dear Nick

I volunteered for the Royal Navy at age 17 and served from 4.1.44 to Oct 46. My service was in the Med, the Indian Ocean, but mainly in the Pacific Fleet. My role was a Telegraphist.

I enjoyed my 56 days demob leave. No vacancy in the clerical job from 16 to joining up, as five other ex-servicemen before me. Didn't really know what to do. Dad got me a job at Treasury Solicitors as a temp civil servant, then decided I needed a job with long term prospects, so to insurance co. in London, moving to a bigger and better one after three years. New company gave staff 100% low interest mortgages, which as I married in '52 we needed.

Did I struggle to adapt to Civvy Street? A bit, not much advice. Did I enjoy post

war years? Yes, friends returning from war getting together for Friday and Saturday booze ups. Glad to be back all in one piece, having some of our school mates weren't and hadn't. I think the current belief that the post war years were depressing is a myth. Most people were very glad they would no longer be bombed and V1 and V2'd (Between June 1944 and March 1945, two types of new pilot-less missiles started being fired at London. Nearly 3,000 bombs landed, resulting in 8,938 deaths and 25,000 civilians being injured. Over 2,000 Allied airmen lost their lives attacking the launch sites on the continent. Their efforts in attacking and damaging the sites saved the lives of thousands of Londoners) and that their sons and bastards would not be killed or wounded. Rationing and shortages were nothing compared to being at peace.

I feel I have had a good life. I think there is still a lot wrong with my country, too much poverty, shortage of affordable housing, too much booze drinking, too much bad behaviour, following Neo-Con American President into illegal war, costing so many lives, especially of our servicemen. Too many Muslims who don't want to be British.

Yours Sincerely
J Relph

Dear Nick Pringle

I was interested in your letter printed in the Bexhill Ad newspaper. In 1937 aged 19, I joined the Terriers, in the 44th Home Counties Division T.A and at the outbreak of WW2 soon found myself in France, proceeding to the Belgian frontier. At the start of May 1940 we advanced into Belgium with the French Army on our right and the Belgians on the left. Within a few days, the Belgians laid down their arms and when the Germans crossed the Maginot Line on 10th May the French forces left us on our own. The march to Dunkirk I have never forgotten. I hope not to bore you but what I endured through the war years may explain my attitude to life later.

After Dunkirk I was posted to the Middle East and I joined the famous Desert Rats (7th Armoured Division) and after the Desert we were sent to Salerno, Italy. Back to England 1st Jan 1944 to be ready for D-Day '44. After Hamburg and Berlin in 1945 I decided to try 'Civvy Street' about 1948.

If some of my friends I left in 'some foreign land' were to return now they would want to know in no uncertain words what we have done to this wonderful country, now taking orders from defeated countries whose sovereignty has been restored thanks to us.

Today living does not compare with pre-war and early post-war. Life was harder, but was accepted by the majority, so that law and order prevailed. As a youngster I lived in some of the tough parts of South London and never once saw or was involved in what happens today. There are answers to our present status quo, but very weak leadership, lack of proper or proper punishment to criminals, the influx of societies to defend wrong-doers against the loss of rights and bending the knee to

Europe would make my old buddies furious, whilst I have to live through things that disgust me.

I must stop. I could go on but have to get ready for a rally of a few of us 'Jerboas' (Jerboa - A small jumping desert rodent found in North Africa!) left, with a pint (not a litre!) to wash it down.

Your Sincerely
Ken Rodden T.D
Ex - sometime Sergeant
Desert Rat

Dear Mr Pringle

After reading your request for the opinions of veterans of WW2, I am a Normandy Vet. Waiting off Normandy beaches I was to go ashore 10.30 am, D-Day, having been briefed early on that the first 48 hours, was crucial, due to German Panzers splitting into three groups, and would take 48 hours for them to assemble into an attack force, and that 50 per cent casualties were expected on landing.

On our section, Juno, we had before leaving the U.K, been attached to the Canadians and they were due to land at 6.30 am. Taking Caen was the main objective, due to crossroad and also that our beaches would be out of range of the German 88's. We had been told that, no soldier under 19 1/2 years old would be sent into the invasion. I was now just over that age, being called up on 4th March, 1943 at 18. Before I go any further I will give you some more service details.

Born 19th January, 1925 and after call up found to be medically fit, but A2 due to my flat feet. Rank- private, then after various courses, my rank was changed to driver, in the R.A.S.C (Royal Army Service Corp) and later the T/ was put in front of my number.

Courses; Initial training, driving course the Army way. Water proofing vehicles, so that they could drive through 3 feet of water, for 3 minutes, before blowing the water proofing off, by putting the plug into the inspection lamp socket. Then the battle course, where the instructor told us 'we would not be fit for Civvy Street, because we were going to be made into killer, to kill or be killed', were his opening words, 'the only safe enemy was a dead one.' Then onto an amphibious course in Wales, learning to be an army sailor, in the handling of the D.U.K.W (amphibian vehicle) weather was too rough to complete.

Then after a spot of leave I was transferred to R.A.S.C 297 GT Company, to be the second driver on A19, D.U.K.W, which was to take Taffy and me, safely through early D+1, France, Belgium, Holland, right up to the River Elbe in Germany to the surrender. I still think it was touch and go, right up to D+3, whether it would be called off.

We were ferrying German troops, that had surrendered, across the River Elbe, to an assembling area, where there must have been hundreds if not a thousand already

assembled. On the way across the River Elbe one spoke to me, in perfect English, as we were nearing the end of the crossing, "We will be comrades, to fight the Russians soon." We did various duties like ferrying supplies, then time came to send our D.U.K.W's back to the U.K, because they were lease lend, not only that they were heavy on using petrol.

All the second drivers were to stay in Germany, and took over some Canadian Chev's. We were now doing duties, one was ferrying displaced persons into the Russian zone, not pleasant. After a while we took over some American Mac's in place of the Canadian Chev's. With these we loaded coal at Bockam coal fields then onto Hamburg, the weather was now getting very cold. Then 297 G.T broke up and I was posted to Bonn in Germany. There I took over an 800 gallon petrol tanker, where I would load up at the Pluto pipe line and delivered to various filling stations in the Rhine area. Then the Belgians took over and we were posted to Bielefeld, then Kiel and other places. From Germany I was posted to Austria, while serving there I got demobbed.

Damage I saw: Caen, badly damaged by massive air strikes. Cologne was the same, but the strange part was the bridge which we travelled over and cathedral was still standing among this destruction. This is where I felt sorry for the German people, what it must have been, the nights all those bombs and incendiaries came raining down.

How did we get on during the occupation, with the enemy? It was said that we may have won the war, but the frauliens won the peace. There came a time when the lads started to help the Germans. There was this one time, it was bitter cold and we were on detail. It was getting dark so we pulled into a farm, on the outside of a village, hoping to bed down for the night under a roof. So we went up to this house or if you like building, opened the door, and there sat round a stove were about a dozen women and children, and you know what they were eating- apples. We had been hoping to cook our meal. We had a few biscuits instead and we all agreed that our rations were took to them inside and gave them to be shared amongst themselves. That's when I became more proud to be British.

We slept in the vehicle cabs that night. It had been that cold during the night, I had difficulty opening the cab door, to get out the next morning. It was frozen.

Back home whilst on my first leave since going to Normandy, there was some prisoners of war, who had just walked past. Then an oldish lady rushed over to me and shouted "Them are better than you lot, bugger off back to Germany!" The lads had been lambasted by the press because they were speaking to the Germans, when they had been told not to. I spent most of my leave in bed under my parent's roof. It was nice to be home, after spending each day as if it was a bonus. My mate and I went to a local dance at the village hall, while on this leave, and you know what, we spent the evening talking to German prisoners of war, that were camped nearby, as if we were all comrades in arms.

After I was demobbed, I was made Z reserve, so when the Cold War started I was called back into the services. In Wales, on Cardigan Bay coast line there was the D.U.K.W, waiting and refresher course. I was kitted out, and at the end of the course I packed my kit in my kit bag, my service number then stencilled on the outside, to be

put in storage, and told before leaving, that I may be called up on a moments notice. But who do you think was using the heavy artillery firing range out to sea, on target practice, yes German troops.

After it was all over and getting back to civvies, my old clothes didn't fit, so at work I wore my ex-army clothes, saving my demob suit for best wear. I missed the lads, even in the hard times, there was something that you could not get in Civvy Street, comradeship. The country seemed on the down, still had rationing, the job I came back to seemed to have no job prospects, so I applied to join Post Office Telephone and was successful, then it became B.T and I was there until I retired.

My feeling now, I have seen this country, what lads died and were killed for, thinking they were defending this country from what they were told was a brutal enemy, but they have not been able to see the way this has country has been taken over by quislings, to minority groups, who pass laws to hand cuff the law abiding citizens knowing they will obey. We now have people entering our country thinking these laws are not made for them, only the English.

Don't forget that some people of the U.K were not able to read and write before the war, so we were brought up to speak the truth. Your word was your bond and your handshake sealed the deal, but what has been put in place? Double dealing, people speaking with fork tongues, who are making vast sums of money on another one's back. Over the years I have read newspapers and listened to other news media and the way they are used to manipulate a story so that we must feel sorry for certain groups. Then we get the ism's at the end. Sexism, racism, human rights, but this is all designed, freedom of ones handcuffs for others, but you know who the others are.

I have two newspapers on a Saturday, Daily Mail and Daily Express. Now there's not many Saturdays go by that their readers are not reminded what brutes the Nazi's were and we must not allow minority groups to be treat this way. Therefore it has been a sledge-hammer, to bring in new laws, to tie our own people's hands.

I am beginning to wonder if the Second World War was started not because Hitler went into Poland, but that they would not stop persecuting the Jews. Even at the Nuremburg Nazi trials, that have just been shown on T.V, the Jewish question is the main theme.

On Friday 6th September, 2006 I was listening to Jeremy Vine on BBC2 and it made me feel sick. He had Muslim women talking on his show about wearing the veil. They were beating the drum that they were in this country and they could do what they like and more or less said, if the English don't like it then too bad. I had just passed an area full of immigrants, my thoughts when out were to all those lads buried in Normandy. Got killed to keep one race from taking over, and we are now a country like Noahs Ark, with every race under the sun. The best part about it is that they are allowed more of a say about running this dear old land than the real populous.

When I was young before the war, we were told what brutes the Germans were, square heads doing the goose step, with their arms held out shouting 'Heil Hitler!' I was proud I took part in stopping him. But when I met the Germans during the occupation, and their soldiers when taken prisoners, my thoughts were they are no different than you and I. Where was the fanatics I was told about?

I think the other big stick that was used to tie our people's hands was the case of the Stephen Lawrence murder, plus the Holocaust and women's rights. I see men let their women make the decisions now to save a lot of arguments. That's how we have come down the ladder.

When you think of it, it took a lot of hard work and persuasion to get the standard of life we are enjoying today in this country. Just when you think we can sit back, in they come in their droves. We were a United Kingdom; it's been broken up to a disunited kingdom. It's like demolishing a mansion to build a lot of prefabs. After all that I have written, I still think this is a great country, and that we are still the centre of the World's freedom but I don't want to see it lost by a load of elected and non-elected do-gooders.

Yours Truly
Tom Whitehouse

Dear Nick

I hope this information isn't too late for consideration, but I don't always pounce on the Saga Magazine when it comes. I am 93 now, so there aren't many about who remember clearly.

I was a civilian aged 32 and had worked as a clerk in an assurance society. I travelled up and down everyday from London to Chessington or Kingswood, where the office had evacuated. Some of the staff, mostly girls, stayed for 4 nights a week as we didn't work on a Saturday, unless it was special overtime. The summers were lovely, but the winters were dour and cold as there was not enough heating. The electricity often failed about 4 and the train journeys were depressing, only lit by a little blue light in each carriage. Most girls brought plain knitting that they did whilst chatting.

The rationing was very difficult and I have found out since that the very big towns were harder hit by the stringency of the rationing. I was not in the forces but was 'reserved' which meant I couldn't change my job or go in one of the forces. However, we who were more or less in the same position had to do part time civil defence. My dad was a full time ARP warden (very popular as an old soldier 1914-18), he was efficient and kind and could always allay people's fears.) My part time was one night a week at the run down fever hospital as a first aider. When the war was over and the chaps started returning back some found their wives had had illegitimate children, or on the other extreme, were cold and distant to their returning husbands. The men also found it difficult to put up with the food rationing, which went on for quite a long time. I believe it finished completely in 1954 (clothes). The civvy suits the ordinary ranks were supplied with fitted anywhere. My husband wore his for weddings and funerals. He died in 2000 and the suit was still in his wardrobe.

No doubt you have been pouring over old photographs and the jolly girls in suits were girls who had been in the forces. We who had not were a bit skinny. When a chap was on leave (because they didn't all get home in 1945) they would bring home a

weeks rations, coupons for extra meat, and usually his cook-house bloke would have a few hunks of cheese for those going home.

My husband got home April '46 and his job was open for him. He and I lived in a terrible grotty top floor flat in an old house. We were asked to distemper the kitchen as a requirement to having the flat. (17 old shillings a week). His mother and father paid that, also in a shocking little house, which had daylight all down one outside corner, and there were rats. People don't realise how rats and mice were a daily occurrence, and people had bugs and fleas, the children had head lice. There was an outbreak of contagious Impetigo and people walked about with purple stuff on their faces.

Seems a miserable existence, but we were all happy to be free of bombings and people being killed. It was a time to get on with our lives.

From
Jean Hooper

Dear Mr Pringle

Your letter gives me the chance I have been waiting for! I am 93, served an apprenticeship in the G.W.R Locomotive Works 1931-1936; afterwards joined an engineering firm to carry out work study, estimating prices etc.

I joined the R.N.V.R in 1937 as an engine room artificer, was mobilized in September 1939, serving HMS Bonaventure (Sunk by an Italian submarine on the 31st March 1941. 139 killed), Prince of Wales (On the 10th December, 1941 As part of Force Z it was attacked from the air alongside HMS Repulse by 86 Japanese bombers, both were sunk with a combined loss of 763 lives .) and Lewes (The ship had originally been the USS Craven, part of the United States Navy and was re-commissioned as HMS Lewes in 1940. Following damage in air raids on Belfast in 1941 the Lewes was repaired and took part in convoy escort duties. The ship was scrapped in Sydney in 1945 a few months after the war ended.) In December 1942 I was given a commission as lieutenant (E) RNVR to serve in Combined Operations as a flotilla engineer for 12 L.C.T's (D-Day in Normandy, and Greece etc.) until May 1946. I was 'Mentioned in Dispatches' during my naval service.

After demobilization, I joined Humphreys and Glasgow Ltd in London as an estimating engineer to do pricing, cost analysis and the technical aspect of budgetary control. I liked the job and felt sure that my ability was appreciated by our managing director. The snag was that many of my colleagues did not understand my function in spite of being blessed by the board. Most of them were Northern and Midland types from working class backgrounds, so regarded me as a 'Toff Snooter'.

When the old M.D retired in 1956, a new smooth type was appointed. He was an ex-salesman who despised ex-servicemen and dismissed three of us with the usual excuses. Over the entire 10 years my own boss told me that we ex RN people had a good time in the war and disclosed he was a communist. Also he and others said that if Germany had won the war, north country working people would have had the same

style of life as under 'wicked factory owners'. I am a member of the NHS patients forum so I'm in touch with people. After the war I had difficult times at home. My mother was a good one in most respects, but she couldn't understand why as an ex naval man I didn't sing jolly songs and go to many dances etc. I spent my leisure on country rambles and hated noise.

Now to my opinion about today.

1. I am not happy about how things are today.
2. All 3 main political parties lack skill and talent.
3. The art of management has been knocked out of people since about 1960 eg. the motor car industry, the railways, the NHS.
4. Universities are turning out too many with useless degrees and insufficient technical cover.
5. Crime is not understood by HMG or the courts so the police do not bother to take the risks in order to stop it. They prefer the easy touch. eg. seven officers when an elderly woman refuses to pay her part of the council tax.
6. The media glorify gays and drugs taken by actors etc so weak youngsters follow on.
7. Bad behaviour in schools was seeded by left wing teachers years ago as discipline was frowned upon.
8. Tradesmen are not encouraged, hence shortage of plumbers, diesel fitters, (nurses even).
9. The farming industry is badly treated.

Now the things that have improved since 1946.

1. Employed people are having a much better deal eg. no immediate taking on and sacking by foremen, as I saw pre 1939.
2. Less snobbery. eg. In my young days Mrs Bank Manager would often not speak to Mrs Shopkeeper. Young middle class women are far more sensible due to most having to hold down jobs.
3. Hygiene in shops is better, (so why more bugs?)

Yours Sincerely
Philip S Evetts

P.S My late father was Sir George Evetts M.I.C.E, MI Mech E, M I Gas E, Gas Adviser to H.M Government. I only had an H.N.C (Mech Eng)!

Dear Nick Pringle

I read your letter in the Weekly Standard. My father, Joe Law was in the Great War 1914-18. Paschendale, Ypres, Wepers, Somme. In between the two wars, my father was in the Terry's. During the 1939-45 War my father was also a fire watcher, as well as a factory worker, fitter/welder. It was hard to pin him down to tell his life in the war,

but I managed to get some stories from him, he died in 1968.

I thought I'd write about the Paschendale episode in poetry form and what occurred while he was in a bunker during the Battle of the Somme. He was a corporal and was wounded in both legs during the battle.

PASCHENDALE

Joe, was there in Paschendale's bloody trenches,
Sore wounds and soldiers cry, but don't want to die,
Comrades in arms, with flying shells screaming wake.

Oh for a good shower or even a bath,
But still cracking jokes that make you laugh,
Anything to take your mind from the vibrant noise,
And earths quake.

With huge explosion above parapit glow,
Before long whistle blow,
And Officers shout over top lads,
It won't be long, fixed bayonets with firelight gleaming.

British guns go silent,
And through fumed cordite, men storm across no mans land,
Towards German' trench into bloody nightmare,
Of machine gun staccato wake,
While comrades fall and die,
With bland faces they lie,
But never will names be forgot in the shadows of the Cross.

BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Joe was there. The Battle of the Somme had been raging for months. His job in the Royal Engineers was as a sapper, burying under German trenches. While sitting in his dug-out connecting up explosives together, a young officer appeared and stood watching.

Transfixed, while he carefully strapped Dynamite sticks together in a bundle and banded them ready for that night's patrol foraging under German trenches. While he was finishing, he picked up a length of detonator fuse and bit the ends together to sharpen it to join in the centre stick. The young officer took one look at what he was doing and ran out of the bunker in terror. He couldn't be found for an hour.

Yours Sincerely
R Law

Dear Nick Pringle

I joined the RAF as a boy entrant, straight from school aged 16, in September

1937, and was trained as an armourer during the following 12 months, at RAF Eastchurch, on the Isle of Sheppey.

In 1938 I was posted to RAF Boscombe Downs as part of the Station Armament Staff and spent a very happy year there until the day, 3rd September '39, when war was declared and I experienced thoughts of 'Why did I do this, and put myself in such danger?' I then decided that I would be safely kept at Boscombe, to maintain the Armoury Staff. How wrong can one be? Within two weeks I was posted to 218 Sqdrn, and found myself part of the B.E.F, some 30 miles from Rheims.(France) Conditions were extremely primitive and we experienced the coldest winter of my entire life, still without any moves from our enemy. Then came a lovely warm spring, and May 10th (1940), the day the German forces walked into Northern France, with everyone fleeing west before their tanks and aircraft, including eventually 218 Squadron, or what was left of it! Our aircraft and crews had been shot down so very easily and our airfield bombed beyond our use.

We found a refuge place in deep forestry, near Troyes, south of Paris. From this point we were ordered home and entrained for St Malo and England. I was happy again, but not for long as during the train journey I was re-posted to Rennes. Rather luckily for me, I feel, the Germans got there first and I finished up as an armourer involved in dropping bombs on Italy, who entered the war in the middle of June. We eventually evacuated from Marseilles on a French coal boat and reached safety at Gibraltar. We had a sharp battle with our so called French allies, who were in collusion with German Armed Forces to hold us as captives (without arms), until the Germans took us prisoners. We eventually reached Liverpool, near the end of June and I was awarded a weeks leave. Yippee!!!

Next, came the Battle of Britain. I was posted to 56 Hurricane Squadron at Biggin Hill and was a Squadron Armourer with 56 until the Battle of Britain ended in September '40. One of my regular jobs was mounting the aircraft wing (from the rear) and removing panels to clear spent rounds of ammo, whilst the aircraft was still taxiing to dispersal saving vital seconds. My pilot was shot down three times in one day surviving it all with another fag (cigarette) and a happy grin. Very great days! Our turn round of Sqdrn aircraft in the midst of battle was less than 4 mins, to re-arm and re-fuel, then up again. Wonderful.

At the end of this exhilarating period, I found myself part of the operations by Barnes Wallis to stop the night bombing of South England, which was depriving the civilian population of necessary sleep. Things went a little wrong and I was wounded by one of our small bombs. After recovery, I boarded a ship, heading via South Africa and Cape Town to India, at Bombay. We eventually reached RAF Digri, in East Bengal and our American B-24 Liberators bombed much of the Japanese held territory in Burma and Malaysia from 1943 until the Japs surrendered, after the atom bombing of Japan. Jap soldiers made huge boards, strapped English captives to it, then rotated the board, whilst throwing bayonets at it. Perhaps you will see that killing Japs was not only essential but very, very satisfying.

We did not return to England until late 1946, a long while after the victory over Japan. Our squadron dropped supplies to many starving people in Indonesia, China

territory after hostilities had ceased.

As to my civilian life after the war, I had a struggle to survive, with my wife to care for on less than £5 weekly wages. I became a postman driver, mainly because of the pension and a happy outdoor life in all weathers, until I retired after 37 years.

I can only say the people of my day and age were wonderful and they were the people we fought for - our folk and our country. They were worth our blood, our sweat and our tears. In those days England was great! Regarding the spoilt, badly educated rude and over aggressive 'yobs' they make me sick. Today's society is all about greedy arrogant self and for today's society I would not have done it. They are quite definitely NOT worth the sacrifices we made. I am proud I was there in those great days.

Yours Sincerely
Harry Dolling

Dear Mr Pringle

I served in the WRNS from 1941 to 1946 in Dover, Gosport, Portland etc. When I came out I had to divorce my husband. He had acquired a lady while serving in the Middle East and she wished to get married. So there I was, only a small gratuity about £50, so as my mother was a widow on a very small pension, I got a job in a big store, very low wages, but I was lucky and acquired an ex naval type, who I had met in the service and we eventually got married.

Life was hard just after the war but we survived it all and, although we never had a lot of money, were very contented until he died in 1972. Luckily, I had joined the Civil Service in 1960 and so got a small pension when I retired in 1976, but worked part time until I was 82 and did voluntary work after. I am a bit disabled now but have very good friends and had a good 90th birthday party. I have always counted my blessings.

We, in the days before the war, were so lucky. As children we were not put under any pressure. If I had an exam my mother used to say "You can only do your best, no one can do better than that" and I must say, I usually passed well. I lived in Richmond, a lovely park and river and was out all day in the summer holidays, when I was very young. Child molesters were put in mental hospitals as judged to be mad if they fancied children. No drugs, no designer clothes, good food and the new radio and lots of books, we were lucky.

I have found an entry from Dover General Orders, which was stuck in one of my scrap books. We held a garden party in the middle of the war, I was the organiser. Dover was rather a noisy place, not known as Hellfire Corner for nothing. It was great fun and went on all day and night as people came and went off duty. I went all round Dover, scrounging barrels of beer from the local brewery, food from various shops, arranged a P.T (Physical Training) display and various side shows and a competition which was judged by Admiral Pridham Whipple. (Only 10 months earlier Vice Admiral Pridham Whipple had been rescued after his ship, the battleship HMS Barham, had been hit by a torpedo and sunk, whilst taking part in anti U-boat operations. The

Admiral was one of 385 survivors picked from the sea by HMS Hotspur, another 176 were rescued by the Australian destroyer, Nizam. They were the only survivors of a crew of 1,311. In total 750 men were killed.)

'R.N.S GARDEN PARTY AND DANCE, SEPT 1942

On Saturday, 19th September, the Wrens held a garden party in the grounds of Dover College and later a dance on the Mess Deck. The amusements included side-shows, competitions, races and a magnificent display of vaulting and acrobatics by members of the 519 Coast Artillery and the Pier Turret by courtesy of Lieut. Col S.C Tomlin, M.C and brilliantly organised and led by Lieut. Curtis Wilson.

If the numbers present, which rather increased than dwindled from the commencement, are any indication, the party was a great success. Our congratulations and thanks are mainly due to Wren Boyce for the most efficient manner in which she played her part as principal organiser of the whole day, ably backed by all those Wrens who ran sideshows, took part in the cabaret and, above all, who stood in the background washing dishes, supplying more food and clearing up with such speed and efficiency at the end of the day.

Rather unwittingly, by charging a very small fee for various side-shows, we were able to hand over at the end of the party
to the Red Cross and St John - £11.6d'
to the W.R.N.B.T - £7.19.9d

Yours Sincerely
Vera Selwood (then Boyce)

Dear Mr Pringle

I am 83 years of age and served in the Fleet Air Arm during WW2.

Your broad question is hard to crystalise and is coloured by the beginning of the development of a grumpy old man. I have no complaints of the NHS because they have kept me more or less in one piece. A quad heart bypass 3 years ago and diabetes have gifted me many aches and pains. So I guess the time since the war has seen some striking improvements in the skills of those who work at the cliff face of medicine who have done some remarkable work from research to implementation. One cannot say the same thing about the mandarins of government at whatever limit.

I was a schoolmaster for nearly 40 years and, of course, now retired for about two decades. Since my life was in academic excellence, namely the grammar school, I spent a good deal of time with my colleagues fighting the dogma of socialism, which has never ceased to build layer upon layer of ideas and doctrine that were useless. Today's news records so many schools in a state of failure because of these people who have little idea of the classroom. Suffice to say that my school is still a state grammar

school providing for very able children, taught by academic minded men of great skills. Socialist concepts of education have failed for years since 1945.

There you have in broad outline two views relating to much of my life. On general lines I bet that many who respond to your letter in the Epsom Guardian and no doubt other newspapers will agree with the following. Moral standards and manners have really worsened whether on the road, in families, in restaurants or on the streets.

The political correctness of the day has led us into plainly daft administration and government. Any future canvasser on my doorstep will be asked one question. "Will you bring to a halt the 'barminess' of today?" We have given a bountiful home to many people of different faiths and they seem to be ruling the roost. As an Englishman I feel I am reduced to the second division. I suppose that I am referring to the total chaos of immigration policy and implementation. I am not allowed to be racist, others who have made this country their home can. To continue on these lines would not be politic in this letter. But look at the nonsense recently of a charming public lady wearing a cross. The whole subject beggars belief. I sometimes simply do not believe what is going on. We really need a bold political party to come to grips with this 'thing' and this must not result in fascism, just plain common sense.....and Englishness of the old fashioned style.

Otherwise, in my Autumn years I live on a pension which is slowly being eroded by a mismanagement of New Labour. They can't even plan for adequate water in our damp island and now the demands of modern packaging has become a major issue. I do feel sorry for myself but I do wonder about the future of my grandchildren.

Sincerely
Teddy Key

What was your role in the Fleet Air Arm?

Navy Pilot with 1772 Firefly Squadron. Active service with Pacific Fleet.

Where did you serve?

Training as usual. Gosport & Lee, Elundon (Tigers), Erol first flight Hurricane. 1772 Fireflies formed up May 1944, disbanded Sydney, Sept. 1945 after action in Pacific on HMS Indefatigable.

Your happiest/funniest moment during the war?

Flying solo in various planes - Tiger, Hurricane, Swordfish, Gladiator, Firefly. Arriving back in UK and restarting one's life and university prior to teaching.

Your saddest moments during the war?

The loss of colleagues whether in flying accidents or in action.

Your most vivid memory of your wartime service?

First attack in action over Japan. First landing on a carrier in a Sea Hurricane on HMS Argus.

Anything else you might want to add....

1. Dons story - (Don was a New Zealander in Teddy Key's squadron and was forced down into the Pacific after being hit by flak. He was an observer on a Firefly, the pilot did not survive the crash landing. Don clambered aboard the planes small yellow rescue dinghy and for three days and nights was baked by the sun and salt and lashed by monsoon waves. During the day sharks would encircle the dinghy. On seeing a ship he fired a flare but it failed to ignite, which turned out to be lucky as when the ship drew closer it turned out to be a Japanese destroyer. A US Privateer plane spotted the small yellow speck that was the dinghy in the vast ocean and radioed for help. A US Submarine eventually surfaced and rescued Don, the sub continued its duties attacking refineries and bridges. Arriving in Guam after being depth charged and bombed while on the submarine, he concluded that the life of a submariner was dicier than that of an airman. Arriving back on HMS Indefatigable, he was cheered aboard by the ships crew. The Padres on board interviewed him and asked whether he had prayed. Don told them "Only once when I lifted my fist to the sky and said look here mate, you got me into this, you bloody well get me out of it!" The Padre made a note "Prayer does work then.")

2. Freddie Hockley and I met on Peterborough Station as two young hopefuls joining up in the FAA. We went through training together. He went Seafires, I went Hurricanes thence to Fireflies. He often visited my mother in Cambridge when he was on leave and we finished up on HMS Indefatigable in 1945. His tragic ending at the eleventh hour was a sad moment for me.

(Sub Lt Hockley RNVR was shot down over Tokyo Bay on August 15th 1945, the day Japan surrendered. Along with other Seafire's he was escorting 10 Firefly and Avenger aircraft attacking Japanese airfields, the last British air mission of the war. The planes were attacked by Japanese Zero fighters and Fred Hockley was hit and parachuted, landing in a village and was taken to the local Civil Defence HQ. Japanese soldiers were awaiting the Emperors noon broadcast announcing the countries surrender. After the announcement Major Hirano Nobuo, Divisional Chief of Staff, ordered that the pilot should be killed in the mountains that night. Nine hours after the noon surrender, Fred Hockley was made to stand in front of a freshly dug grave, blindfolded and hands tied. He was shot four times and rolled into the grave. Still alive, a sword was thrust into his back before the grave was filled in. In 1947 at a war crimes trial in Hong Kong, Nobuo and another Japanese soldier, Col Tamura, were both found guilty and were hung.)

Dear Mr Pringle

I am interested in your letter in Saga Magazine and I thought I would contribute a few lines.

I went into the Army in 1942 after basic training in a Victorian or earlier barracks of a well known Scottish Regiment. I was posted to the No.1 Training Centre of the Reconnaissance Corp, also in Scotland. We were told we were being trained to work right out in the front of the main part of the Army, to find and observe the enemy and wireless back to command any details of troops or equipment that we could see.

After about three months on vigorous training, the infantry part of which was based on Commando training, we were posted to a holding regiment of the Corps. From there we were shipped to North Africa and after a brief stay in a transit camp, presumably to acclimatise us, we were shipped to Sicily where we joined the 5th Reconnaissance Regiment. It had taken part in the invasion of Sicily and was preparing to take part in the invasion of the Italian Mainland. We remained in Italy taking part in the campaign throughout the bitter winter of 1943 to 1944, until Rome fell to the Allies in June 1944, when the division to which we belonged to was shipped out to the Middle East for re-training and re-equipment. It had taken part in river crossings and the Anzio Beachhead and had considerable losses. Re-trained, we were shipped back to Italy and expected to be sent north to re-join the two armies but instead we were brought across into France to Marseilles, and a special train across France. We took part in the follow-up troops of the Rhine crossing and the advance across Germany, meeting the Russians. We discovered some concentration camp victims in the last days of the war.

Soon after the end of the war all reconnaissance regiments were disbanded and the work of reconnaissance in the reduced army reverted to the light cavalry regiments. Those like myself who were younger soldiers, were posted to one of those regiments, and I spent twelve months (1945 to early 1947) with a detachment in Berlin.

I don't think that I had great difficulty in settling down, as I was due about two months leave, part demob and part because my overseas service amounted to over three years. I settled down to a good 'holiday' at home with my parents, which was a rehabilitation, and it was only when my father asked my mother if I was ever going to look for a job, that I started seriously looking. There was of course no such thing as counselling at that time. About twenty years later, after I was back in civvy street, I looked up a friend in Wales, whom I had seen quite a lot of in the Army. I was surprised when he asked me, in a confidential matter, whether I had difficulty settling down after demob, and I had to say that I hadn't.

Whilst there have certainly been great advances in material standards of life in many other directions there has been a deterioration. Thinking first of standards of honesty and integrity, much of that deterioration started in war-time. There was a terrific amount of what many did not think of as dishonesty, but was certainly theft. Petrol was the basis of much of this - petrol was always available in quantity, especially to front-line mobile troops, tanks, armoured cars, etc., and there was considerable pilfering and disposal to civilians, who were experiencing shortages in the countries we operated, and through which we passed.

Also there was some 'bartering' of food, which was also in shortage amongst all civilian populations. Tins of 'Bully Beef' were almost a currency, particularly after the war, in Germany, which experienced very grave shortages. Wonderful dishes could be

produced based on 'Bully Beef', and the exchanged commodity was usually sex. There had been a general loosening of standards in sexual behaviour since the war, and this too was largely brought about by wartime conditions. People generally became much more mobile in the war, not only service people who were moved around as military situations demanded, both men and women, but there were large movements of people to meet aircraft and military manufacture. People thus thrown together often found new partners, even if already engaged or married. There was an attitude of living for the day, because one did not know what the next day would bring. This behaviour also carried into the post-war period.

Loose sexual behaviour can hardly be a good thing. When the 'Webbs', recognised as founders of the Labour Party, extolled 'sexual freedom' they did not state how the products (births) of illicit relations should be fed and cared for, with a result that now we have a vast number of one parent families who are a burden on the tax payer. Not only that, but where you have intellectually (liberal elite) councils, single mothers are given priority over genuine families awaiting for accommodation. There is also a great increase in divorce and broken families, which has produced a widespread increase in criminality, as the children grow up. Traditional families generally give more stability to children and are less likely to produce criminals, so the statistician's inform us.

Added to all this is the high publicity given to bed-hopping, adultery and divorce of celebrities, and since the media now give more attention to publicity to the cult of celebrity, there is a strong pattern for people with ordinary lives who say 'why not me?'. Then of course there is the additional pressure of drug-taking. I don't know quite how we have got into the bad state that we are now in. No one seems to be offering any effective solution. I suppose the situation of moneyed people years ago taking drugs including cocaine, caused less well off people to try them and so create a demand. The down grading of cannabis was controversial at the time, and now is seen clearly as a mistake, as two headline murders recently were cannabis related. Drugs and promiscuity both lead to abortion, rape and STD's.

The other item, which has done nothing to solve any problems, is of course, the Government. The John Major Government, which sadly lowered the standard and was pretty abysmal, not surprisingly when it became clear that he had been having an affair with Edwina Currie, the 'Egg Woman'. Apart from any other aspects of that ie. cheating on a fairly sound and supportive wife, what shocking taste it revealed - Ugh! How awful, Currie, the egg-woman. That gave the Labour Party its long and desperately awaited chance and brought into office quite the worst government that we have had in all my years.

Shortly after this Government came into power in 1997, I received a short questionnaire on green, almost flimsy, paper from Labour Party Head Office, with Blair's facsimile signature. This mentioned four items, with the wording roughly as follows;

Do you believe in?

The best possible Health Service available at the point of need.

Good law and order.

A really good education system, available to all.
A much improved good value transport system.

It went on to say that these would be the policy and aims of the new Government, so would I support them and would I like to make a contribution to the Labour Party. I have never joined the Labour Party before or since, but I would be querying my own common sense if I answered 'no' to any of those points so I answered 'yes' to the four and there was a space for comments so I wrote;

'I am not a betting man, but if I was, I would not bet on a horse that had not run before.' We now know that not one of these four items has been satisfactorily dealt with in the past ten years, and when in addition we have been taken into military action totally unnecessarily. Blair has the blood of many servicemen on his hands. He has sent our first class troops into Serbia/Kosovo and Afghanistan to boost his ego in the hope of appearing as the statesmen that he is not. In addition, whilst he has taken every excuse to travel round the world, rather than pay any attention to domestic problems, things have got steadily worse in every direction. The situation of both asylum seekers and immigrants, terrorists and about half a dozen financial matters are in chaos.

The funding of Pension Credit, Income Credit and the financial state of the country generally is now so desperate that if elderly people need to go into a nursing home, the authorities will do all they can to get their hands on their personal home, for which all too frequently, has been something for which they have saved for all their lives. This is the brave new Britain led by Mr President Blair. When Brown became Chancellor, at the time he was walking on the water alongside Blair, the first thing he did was to deprive the pension funds of their tax credits, amounting to approximately five billion each year. Now those are not in Government funds and once paid in, partly by employers and partly by employees, the funds have belong usually to trusts, nominated by those two bodies. They certainly are not Government funds and Brown had no ethical right to tamper with them. Two years ago, the City analysts were saying that a big black hole was occurring in the country's finances, and it seems they were right. As one observer said recently. 'One thing can be said for Gordon Brown, it has taken him longer than any previous Chancellor to mess up the country's finances.'

Some of us, of course, can remember the Ground Nuts Scheme, which turned into a money burning fiasco, also the scandal of 'Dr' Dalton, a Labour Chancellor who revealed some budget plans so that his friends could benefit, the slag heaps scandal during the Harold Wilson Government, and the time when Denis Healey had to go running to the World Bank for a loan because he had brought the economy nearly to bankruptcy, and, more recently the Millenium Dome. In my humble opinion and the observation of a considerable number of years, I think that the Labour Party couldn't run a booze up in a brewery.

The latest fiasco, announced almost as I write, is that there is an average of a murder a week on our streets by people who are of unsound mind and make the lives of innocent people unsafe. Some of us can remember a time when people could walk around at will and quite safely, but that wouldn't be politically correct.

After unloading a load of pessimism I must add a note of optimism. When I see

the occasional family complete with two parents, nicely dressed and the children well behaved, a brief silver lining appears in my vision, and I think, well, this does not happen very often but that it does occasionally, at least we didn't do what we did all those years ago for nothing.

With very best wishes
Mike Bush

Dear Mr Pringle

I was born in Liverpool in 1923 and attended Quarry Bank High School, where John Lennon was later a pupil. When studying at Oxford University I volunteered for the Navy, and started basic training in HMS Collingwood, at Fareham in 1942. As an Ordinary Seaman I served in the Hunt class destroyer, HMS Tanatside, escorting troopships to Gibraltar and Algiers. In 1943, after officer training in HMS Alfred at Hove, I was commissioned Sub-Lieutenant RNVR. The rest of the duration I served as a Navigating Officer, and later as First Lieutenant, in a number of motor torpedo boats operating in the North Sea and the English Channel from bases at Great Yarmouth, Ramsgate, Dover, Gosport and Ostend.

My war was relatively quiet, I was only in a few actions and wasn't wounded. But I've never forgotten that my three best friends were killed, and another friend severely disabled. We had talked a lot about the world we expected to see after the end of hostilities. We noted that it had taken a war to put an end to mass unemployment, and to give most people an interesting and useful job. Like nearly all the folk we talked to in the forces and civvy street, we were determined that there would be no return to the bad old days of slums and dole queues, of insecurity in sickness and old age, and of glaring inequalities in education and health care.

So my dead friends would have shared my satisfaction that the Labour government elected in 1945 created the welfare system, started a massive housing drive, established the National Health Service, and took basic industries and services into common ownership. I hope my friends would also share my alarm that the government followed the United States in producing nuclear weapons and launching the Cold War against our wartime ally, the Soviet Union, whose people had borne the brunt of the victorious struggle against Nazi tyranny.

Sixty years on and we have another government that calls itself Labour but is busy continuing Thatcherite Tory policies of privatising public services, undermining local government, promoting greater inequality of incomes and wealth, and - worst of all - sending our armed forces into illegal, immoral and unwinnable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, wars instigated by the United States for oil and power.

Yes, most people have a higher standard of living, but what of the quality of life? Though a majority alive today didn't experience our wartime hopes for a better future, I'm convinced that unsatisfied expectations lie at the root of today's social malaise; the growing consumption of drugs (both illegal and prescribed ones), binge

drinking, violence and vandalism on the streets, hatred of dull and pointless jobs, fear of strangers, and the rest. I believe their apparent cynicism and selfishness, many people, perhaps most, have that same yearning we had during the war, for a world of greater equality, security and opportunity, where we can all respect each other without reserve.

Yours Sincerely
David Grove

(A letter was received from Mr Brede's wife explaining that he would like to contribute but is now partially sighted and now unable to read or write. Here is the transcription of his phone contribution.)

The way we are living today with out present Prime Minister (Tony Blair), I don't think any of the lads in the prisoner of war camp I was in would take very kindly to him, the way things are going, because all they worked for and went for is now being eroded. This government wants a police state.

Children get to much freedom and money, saying they have nothing to do. Do they ever talk to their parents about anything, which I don't think they do, not like they used to in the old days before the business of television and things like that. That's my opinion and I think this would be the opinion of all the characters I was prisoner of war with, especially the last three years when we were all in Japan after a horrendous boat ride.

I was in Malaya, Singapore and Java, where we became P.O.W's and all the people there I think would be horrified if they were seeing what we are seeing today, the way things have turned out. It's not on. We were wasting our time fighting for a noble cause. We've come right back into this business of fighting, Afghanistan and the Middle East war. I feel sure they would not appreciate it at all, as things stand.

I'm 85, I started off on the first day of the war I joined 21 Squadron, light bombers; Blenheims. Then I went in 218 Squadron who were coming out of France, having lost all their fear in battles. They were just getting used to twin-engined aircraft, they then went to Marne to fly Wellingtons. About 1941, I'd been on a fitness course and was drafted overseas, went to Singapore and finished up joining 100 Squadron.

We were told the Australians were going to build a torpedo bomber, we were told they'd be coming up from Australia. We went to their base headquarters, where we joined 100 Squadron and they knew nothing about the aircraft coming up. The aircrew were then flying Wildebeasts that came out between the wars about 1930, bi-planes, with torpedoes attached. They were used on bombing raids to attack the Japanese in Malaya, but were slow, they were shot up, so we were without bombers, the only aircraft flying about were Fairey fighters flown by Australians.

We went to Malaya, Sandamak Airfield, where the Aussies had been. We were there for about 4-5 days, the wing commander said you might as well go down to the docks and get on one of the boats, as he said they were going to Australia, but when we

did, we were attacked by the old low flying Japanese. After that we had two other high level attacks. We went to Java, that's where the ships officer in charge of all the troops said "get off here, we can operate from Java," but it never happened. The Dutch people at that time did not want their cities in the East Indies to be bombed and damaged, so we had to pack in and become prisoners of war, that's how I saw it in my own eyes.

I was prisoner of war for 3 1/2 years, seven months in Java and three years in Japan, army people, and one or two Americans. Twelve month weren't able to do anything, always hungry. We had a few Red Cross parcels in three years. In Java we marched to the airport, where the Dutch had blown up a cross section of the runway, we were filling it in. I ran out of shoes, so I was then bare footed.

Then we went up to Japan, we were in the dockyards, where they were building boats, until the Americans with their B29's and the Fleet Air Arm aircraft came over and bombed everything. Our camp where we were living was attached to the dockyard and apparently from up there, we looked as though we were part and parcel of the dockyard so we were getting bombed as well.

They got some Japanese characters who could speak a bit of English and they were in charge of each party working down the dockyard, and after the first year in Japan the army people except for the commandant left to go to the war front and we were taken over by guards, that were what we would call 'Dads Army', people who had been in the army but were drafted out for guard duties.

When the atom bombs dropped, that was when the war stopped and we waited for the Americans to release us, they took us down to Tokyo and a boat to Australia. I was an engineer, what was known as an air frame fitter and I stayed in the Air Force for 35 years altogether and finished up as a chief technician.

Mr Brede

Dear Sir,

Yes, I did serve in the last war, 1940-1945, Service No. 1156503 Sgt. RAF. 2 years in England, 3 years in India, Iraq, North Africa, & Italy- 8th and 5th Army.

Since the war, the country has gone downhill. We are short of hospitals, prisons, schools and houses and still we allow immigrants into the country.

Many other countries like Italy and Germany (who lost the war) pay ex-servicemen a pension. We who won the war get nothing. I just about manage on a state pension. I am now 86 yrs and dread the future.

Yours
A.J Grantham

Dear Nick Pringle

I was brought up by my mother and father. Dad was a miner in the pits for coal.

Mother stayed at home to look after me and my brother. At 5 I went to school, we were not rich. After a moderate upbringing and education we nearly all left school at 14 inc myself.

We lived near an aerodrome, Desford near Leicester no7 E.F.T.S. I got my first job working on the Tiger Moth aircrafts, 6 days a week, nights and days. I enjoyed my work for the war effort 1941-45 and did it well, at 18 it was down the mines or forces. As an A.T.C cadet in the RAF, 7 or 8 trades, I went for nursing and enjoyed looking after the sick to make them fit from the wards of a large hospital, Wroughton, Wilts to fight for King, Queen and country. I took up nursing in civvy street, it was like home from home, money poor in those days, so I went back into engineering on laths for most of my life. At 65 I retired not happy with the country, pension poor and been on more protests that I can remember for health, education and us over 65 year olds. I married in 1954 and had two children, boy and a girl. Wife passed away 11th Nov 2004, after 51 1/2 years.

I have fought for 5 years for boys 14/15/16/17 1914-1918, now they have been pardoned 90 years late, so I have won, they called it S.A.D Shot At Dawn, you could not trust Dr John Reid M.O.D so I started work on the new one Des Browne M.O.D May 2006, the M.O.D wrote to me in August and thanked me. I have a memorial in our Victoria Park (peace walk) for women that died in the last great war 1939-45 and women and men who fought on the home front, unveiled by the Queen on 9th July 2005, I felt it my duty to go. Next day I had lunch in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, that was one of the happiest days of my life, saddest, my mother and wife passing away.

Now for 5 or 6 years we are fighting to save the N.H.S (keep public services public) no to foundation hospitals. Free at the point of need. Donated 64 pints of blood, I gave my 1st pint in the RAF. I would give my last 8 pints to stop PFI.

Wilf Corbett
Ex RAF Nurse L.A.C

Dear Nick Pringle

I reply to your request in the Market Rasen Mail. In the 1930's I lived near Dorking in the county of Surrey, where my father had a small country garage. My main interests at that time were motor cycles and motor cycling.

I joined the RAF on 2-8-39 six weeks before my twenty second birthday. Contract of service - 6 years. Trained as a Flight Mechanic then Aero Engine Fitter. July 1942 volunteered for Flight Engineer (Aircrew). Trained as a Lancaster Flight Engineer. With a crew bombing operations with 57 Squadron RAF Scampton, March to July 1943. From August to November '43 bombing operations with 97 P.F.F Squadron RAF Bourn. From November 1943 to October 1944 Instructor at No. 20 Operational Training Unit RAF Lossiemouth. From November 1944 to the end of the European War bombing operations with No.7 P.F.F Squadron RAF Oakington. Released from the RAF 4 January 1946, rank on release - Warrant Officer D.F.C (Distinguished Flying Cross)

When I left the service, I was well aware of the fact that with thousands of others I had now joined the ranks of the homeless and unemployed. In November 1944 I had married. After leaving the RAF, my wife and I went to live with an elder brother and his wife and two children at Lancing, West Sussex.

I did not struggle to adjust in civvy street, but it was a very bad time and many things were not yet organised for peacetime. In the RAF I had been somebody, now like thousands of others I was nothing. Inwardly I did find that hard. At Lancing I was unemployed for a time. West Sussex at that time was a poor area for employment and some people I came into contact with seemed to have an old fashioned attitude. I applied at a resettlement bureau for a course and due to my RAF training and experience wanted engineering. I was told wrongly that engineering was finished when, in fact, it boomed in the post war years and still continues.

I soon realised that I had to seek employment elsewhere. I then had a bit of luck. Purely by chance, I read in the Motorcycle Magazine that men would be wanted at The Vincent H.R.D Motor Cycle Company and Engineers in Hertfordshire. I then wrote offering my services and was asked to go for an interview. I had a Triumph motorcycle that I had purchased in 1939 and I went to Stevenage, secured a job and started work with the Vincent Company in June 1946. For me it was an ideal and interesting job, but the pay was a lot less than my RAF pay and it took quite a few years before I reached the same standard.

I received no help or support with living accommodation and found my own. For about a year we lived in rooms, we then moved into a very old cottage in a village near Stevenage. I went on the housing list with the local council and although there was a points system for war service in the armed forces and I had the maximum and my wife had served in the A.T.S, we were never offered a council house. I think some were allocated to ex German prisoners of war that were allowed to stay in England. I suppose the reason for us not getting a council house was because there were more deserving cases.

After ten years with the Vincent company I went on the staff. About 1958/59 the Vincent company changed ownership and in 1961 all engine work was discontinued. I then moved on to Vauxhall Motors, Luton. At Vauxhall I worked in the experimental engine shop, building petrol and diesel engines. In my opinion Vauxhall were very good to work for and I was treated well and paid well. After a few years at Vauxhall I managed to scrape up enough money for a deposit on a Victorian terraced house in Stevenage old town. After retiring, the first thing I did was to pay off the mortgage on the house. In 1990 we sold the house and bought a house at Market Rasen, Lincolnshire. Market Rasen is a happy little town and its people the most friendly, happy and genuine that I have ever met. My wife being a Lincolnshire girl was highly delighted with our move, but died 4 years ago. We had been together for 58 years, I now live alone.

Life in the UK in 2006. The country is now very prosperous, people now appear to be treated well in the workplace and have money for a good lifestyle. No doubt like millions I am concerned about crime such as Kleptomania, fraud, deceit, vandalism, violence and murder, no-go areas, the sale and using of drugs and consumption of

alcohol by our young people and their behaviour, the litter on our street's and other public places, the inadequacy of our laws, the police and our courts and the state of our public transport, (mostly the railways). All that I have mentioned are now almost taken for granted. There is also the degrading fact that most of what we now use for our every day use is now manufactured in foreign countries or by foreign companies based in Britain.

Our Prime Minister is driven around in a German car. Even our football clubs are being bought by foreigners, and the London Stock Exchange is now under threat. Immigrants have changed many of our towns and cities. Supermarkets have made shopping far easier but many seem too wield to much power. Many have destroyed small shops and the character of towns and have been built on playing fields. Many now go to supermarkets on the Sabbath instead of church. Drugs are one of the greatest concerns and have greatly increased crime and disorder and are destroying thousands of lives. Many people live in fear of violence on our streets and there is a marked lack of law and order. Criminals should be given real hard labour and a ball and chain instead of tagging. It is a concern that many churches are kept under lock and key to guard against theft and vandalism, there are now no go areas in towns and cities when during the war-time blackout our people could go anywhere without fear. The NHS is a really wonderful organisation.

Best Regards
Jack Lazenby DFC

(Follow up to my thanks letter.)

Dear Nick

You asked me under what circumstances I was awarded the DFC. You are one of the few to ask, even close relations have never asked under what circumstances for which I received it. There were two ways a DFC or DFM medal was awarded.

The Immediate Award was for some act of bravery (quite often for self preservation). For example a pilot nursing back to base a badly damaged aircraft and landing it successfully. A crew member fighting and putting out a fire, or a crew member although badly wounded by enemy action continued with his job.

The Non Immediate Award was often awarded for the number of operations a crew or crew member had carried out. After completing a first bombing tour of 30 operations a pilot and navigator were often awarded the DFC or DFM according to their rank. The DFC was for officers and warrant officers and the DFM for non commissioned officers and men. You will often see high ranking officers with among their decorations a DFM (Distinguished Flying Medal), this shows that at one time they had been n.c.o air crew.

After completing a tour of 30 operations, a crew was usually split up and posted to training units to become instructors. After about a minimum of 6 months they could then be called back for a second tour of bombing operations, which was twenty. I

served as an instructor with No.20 Operational Training Unit Lossiemouth. After ten months I was informed that I had to go back on bombing operations and I asked to go back on Pathfinders. (In August 1942, Arthur Harris, head of RAF Bomber Command instructed Donald Bennett to form an elite night bombing 'Pathfinder' force that would be first to fly over enemy target's. Dropping flares and incendiaries they helped the main bombing force to find an accurate path in the darkness and increased the effectiveness of the RAF bombing operations.) I then operated with No.7 Pathfinder Squadron at Oakington. I operated until the end of the war and did 53 bombing operations. It was for that number of operations that I was recommended for a DFC. Some referred to Non Immediate Awards as 'survival gongs'. All awards are announced in The London Gazette, the date of mine being 25-9-45.

Good Luck for the future.

Best Regards

Jack Lazenby

Dear Mr Pringle

Churchill Tank Driver, North Irish Horse Regiment
Tunisia, 1943

We were returning from a long range patrol about three miles into enemy territory when we hit a mine in the road. We all got out safely and I ran for the mountains, but then decided to go back and check to see if the gunner had got out because I hadn't seen him. The gunner wasn't there but the Germans were. They said the war is over for you, and that was it we were taken prisoner. I was flown from Tunisia to Italy, harassed by a Hurricane but not attacked and then by train to Stalag V111 B, Germany.

They found out I was an engineer with Armstrong Siddeley in Coventry before the war from my army pay book. I should have destroyed it, but you don't think of these things at the time.

I worked in a food depot loading food onto trains for the Russian front. Our camp of about 44 POWs was in a village hall about a mile away. If we encountered German rookies marching, singing their marching songs, we sang ours but always half a step out of theirs and being rookies, they were all over the place as they were Luftwaffe, and our guards being army, our guards were on our side. We also had a version of one of their songs, which we sang in German. 'My man is in Russia, my bed is free'. As you can imagine, that went down well! We always had clean boots and marched properly, our way of saying 'we may be your P.O.W but we are not beaten.'

We made it our aim to steal as much as we could off them from the food depot at Opplin. I was accused of stealing 24 bottles of British Whisky and sent to Grosstrelitz for three months as punishment, even though I hadn't done it. It was a hard labour camp and every day we had to load 20 tonnes of rock into skips and then push them to where they were transported away to be turned into cement. The camp was run by SS

guards and the conditions were terrible. It was pointless trying to escape unless you could speak a second language, which I didn't, but you always tried to get out of working for the Germans. One day I tried to fake shell shock as a result of them blasting the rock face. I sucked on a piece of soap until I was foaming at the mouth and then I screamed and shook and fell over.

They took me to the hospital at Breslau, where the doctor took one look at me and said I was malingering. It was on the way back I saw a newspaper article saying the invasion of Europe had failed. I didn't believe their version, although I knew there must have been something happening. The paper belonged to my guard who was escorting me. I gave him three English cigarettes from my prisoner of war ration pack in exchange for the newspaper and smuggled it back into camp. We read the report and thought we'd be released and back home in time for Christmas, but we were completely wrong. I eventually got out the quarry by scratching my arms red raw with nails and stones and rubbing salt in them. The Germans were scared of skin diseases so they sent me straight to another hospital. (Then from January until May 1945 Mr Robbins was marched along with his fellow POW's, 850 miles to Munich as the Russians starting advancing towards the German border. His German guards fled in May as the Americans arrived and he was liberated.)

On returning to the UK we were given a swift medical, a travel pass and double food rations for six weeks. I was 9st 10lb, normal weight 14st. I was on fortnightly extended leave from May until October, sent to camp 'Peaceover Hall', Knutsford for a month, which was supposed to be our rehabilitation to civilian life. From there demob clothing (Oldham) no other assistance was given.

If my fallen comrades could return to this country today they would wonder who the victors were. I thought that joining the Common Market, the word market meant trade, not as a way of handing our sovereignty to the Germans and French, to dictate to us what we can and cannot do. After all we fought and died for our freedom, which is slowly but surely being taken away from us. Also, these 'do goody' and political correctness organisations have taken the great out of Great Britain. I could go on about Britain today, but it's all in the media and it doesn't make good reading.

Yours Sincerely
Mr Alan Robbins

Dear Mr Pringle

I saw your article in the Coventry Evening Telegraph tonight. I am now 84 and can tell you about a few events, which may interest you. I talk, of course, of 1941 and so on. I often think back of these incidents and wonder crikey, did it really happen? But they did. The walls of my room are covered in pictures and memories of long ago. I sometimes just stand and glance along, old pals and comrades, long gone some of them, but the memories don't fade and they all played their part and at least one I owe my life to, which, even today, I think what an escape! I often say to my wife, between us we can

beat Houdini for escapes from death. So while I'm still here, I'll get a few things down which I feel proves that luck and destiny shapes our end's, so many only get one such a chance to escape, only to fail.

One night in the Home Guard, we turned out for an alert, (Headquarters, Newport Road, just outside Cardiff town centre). The Germans were supposed to have landed at Swansea, they issued us with broomsticks! Should have left the brushes on, we could have swept them back into the sea!! Anyway, false alarm, (lucky for us.)

The Grand Hotel in Rimini, Italy was our HQ (Mussolini's old hotel), very run-down by then, (war in Italy was over). Had a shower one day, water running, I stuck my arm on electric wire coming out of wall! Saved again. I said to my wife only the other day, "I think they'll have to beat me to death!" She's a walking miracle too.

I worked at Guest Keen & Sheetfolds Steelworks, Cardiff Docks. War broke out, I was on night-shift, air-raids on Cardiff came fairly often and a land mine took the roof off our dept. I took a dim view of that. I joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and spent many nights on the end of a hosepipe putting out fires while dodging whatever came flying down in the centre of Cardiff. I was beginning to think someone was after me!

I joined the Home Guard, I'll be safe here I thought. One night a regular Army service soldier appeared with a Lewis machine gun. Oh boy, our first look at a war weapon. We formed a circle round him and he held the gun crooked in his arm, as he slowly moved round with the gun pointing to us all in turn. "It's OK." he said "It's not got a magazine on." He'd just passed me, when his right hand cocked the gun, BANG!! off it went, and a chappy next to me hit the deck. All went silent and we gathered round him, a bullet had gone straight through his throat, a few gurgles and he'd gone. We were all sent home that night, my face must have looked a picture as my mother was out cleaning our house front in Severn Grove. She could see I'd seen a ghost or something. Enough's enough, I'll join the Army.

My brother, who was in the Welch Guards, was just 19 and had sadly just been killed as his regiment along with many other various regiments held the perimeter around Dunkirk, while the evacuation of all the troops back to England took place. They had been ordered to fight to the last man, to enable what took place. That took courage.

I went to Warminster for tank training on Salisbury Plain in Churchill Tanks and then joined a regiment called North Irish Horse, to make up the numbers. I was sent home on embarkation leave for a few days. I walked from Cardiff railway station with full kit and a machine gun on my arm, fully loaded too. I felt like Al Capone's right hand man!

Off to North Africa and Algiers and met up with tanks and went off across country to first action. I'd palled up with a chap (By total coincidence the chap, Alan Robbins, also wrote to me after seeing my appeal in another local paper. His letter is the one before this one! They both only realised the other had wrote as well, after they had read the 1st edition and then wrote to tell me of their pleasant surprise!) who was from Coventry and his troop of tanks went at first light, down over a bank, into a valley and never came back. We looked over into the valley at daybreak and they had all run into a mine field and all been captured by the enemy. We made our way round the valley and

BANG! An 88mm hit us right in the engine compartment. Got away with it again!

The Churchill tank was an amazing tank, and though not comparable to the Tiger tank in fire power, we were able to climb sometimes above clouds which shrouded mountains and come down behind the enemy and catch 'em unawares. The African Campaign was more or less like that all the way. Anyway, Jerry kept going back and Africa finally fell to the Allies. We went through Tunis as the crowds lined the streets with a wave etc.

After a spell over to Italy. We now had Sherman tanks, faster than Churchills and not so heavy. Off again, early morning just to have a spot of breakfast, Billy Hill our driver, an Irishman, I was his front gunner, spare driver on the left, machine guns between us. Billy said to me "I don't feel too good, I'll go away with my shovel and if I don't feel better after, you will have to drive." Coming back, he said "I'm OK." So off we went along a road, valley on the right, on the left banks up to ploughed fields, a few bends and in sight of a village called Ripa, BANG! Sparks all round and all hell let loose. Boy, I was always quick in those days. I shouted "Everybody out, we've been hit!" and as usual I was first out and, being as the turret gun was pointing to the front, my hatch would open. So all round behind the tank and up in the field on the left, looking round, no Billy. We could see our tank about 20 yards, the engine was still running. Tank Commander James Barlow (another Irishman and what a grand man he was) slipped down the bank and started to climb the front of the tank, when they hit it again and James fell off, but fortunately was only slightly injured, so he joined us. There was nothing more we could do and so we were ordered to go back on foot. We learned later that Bill had been killed outright. We were shelled by mortars while in that field and all hit in the bum with shrapnel.

May 23rd 1944, My birthday!! A very misty morning. Once again early dawn, our squadron, along with the Canadians and many other regiments, started to advance not far from Pontecorvo, couldn't see much, very misty. Through the murk and looking through my periscope I saw we were in the middle of a wood, with trees; some big, some small. James Tank Com. got out to have a recce and see what the position was. The mist started to clear, we were right facing the Hitler Line. What we didn't know was that Jerry had spent a heck of a lot of time building that line, turret guns were dug in. Suddenly all hell broke loose, our tank was in the middle of five trees and were snapping like twigs and in no time at all on fire. Through my scope, I saw a lieutenant from the tank in front leading the driver Kitchener (another Irishman) away from the tank. We heard later he lost an arm. In the meantime, one of our lads in the turret looked back and saw James frantically waving, telling us to get the hell out of it, which our driver did very quick. I couldn't believe it, dozens of tanks were hit that day, ours sailed out, (Was it me again? I began to think my lucky star was at it again.) The Regiment was awarded the Maple Leaf badge by the Canadians for the action that day.

We went by Mt Cassino, just after that action. What a campaign Mt Cassino was. The Germans had such an advantage point, being right up there, but eventually the footsloggers finally got em out, but such losses. They all deserved a medal.

When my mate (Alan Robbins) was captured in North Africa, I wrote to his parents and his sister answered. We wrote all through the war and when it finished and

back home, I went to Coventry and we got married and we've just done our Diamond Wedding. I've been with my son once to France for my brother's grave in Cassel and then through a lottery grant to Italy and near Cassino, on to Assisi and to visit Billy's grave to pay my respects. My wife and I believe that we were meant to meet right from the start and my son who had one son, who's mum died of cancer, when he was nine. So, when no-one else would take him on, we took over and he's now 24, has a good job as a builder/plasterer etc. lovely girlfriend who's at college. So maybe that was what it's all been about. I'm still quite fit and can even run for a bus. My mother died at the age of over 100, so maybe I ain't done yet. My wife and I had great family lives before we met and our family lives are still as good. My son is 51 and also OK. It's disappointing the way today's world has turned out, but like the weather I suppose things change. Somethings that happen today are an insult to all those who died, but waking up I think, 'Blimey!' I'm still here.
Best of Luck

Nobby Hines

Dear Sir,

You ask, "What do I think of my country at present?" My answer is that, I don't think I have a country to call mine anymore. My father was a soldier in the First World War. I, myself, a soldier in the Second World War. In both instances the reason we were told was to defend our freedom and way of life against the forces of evil.

In both instances, as you will know, we were successful in combat and our glorious leaders were, at that time, very pleased and we were wonderful people. They were correct in that the people and the men I served with were wonderful people, of that there is no doubt at all.

However, as in any society, there are people who have positions to their advantage so as to gain an audience and promote their own ideals. Many of these people are our politicians who joined on the band wagon to carry favour amongst the liberal minded.

This attitude has gathered pace over the years and the consequences are being felt all over the country with young people causing problems in many places and unruly school children creating problems knowing that there is no means of using discipline without infringing their "human rights" or being charged with assault. (Give them an inch and they will take a mile springs to mind.)

In the meantime, the evil we fought against and lost so many good young men to maintain our so called FREEDOM has been betrayed by our political leaders who have allowed, what used to be my country, to be invaded by millions of immigrants and not content with that they also changed our laws to accommodate them.

The politicians brag that we have free speech, this is nonsense. We only have free speech so long as what we say they agree to, especially if it regards immigrants or their descendant's. These people have to be called "Britons" the liberal minded insist.

We can't even be English anymore, it's not even on the census form. I, myself, register as "any other nationality".

These same people, not many year's ago at the time of trouble in Africa, were telling me that Africa was for Africans and the white man should not be there. I totally agree with that philosophy. It does, however, cut both ways and to me, a black or brown person or any other immigrant is someone who resides in what was my country, they are not British. Had I been born in China of English parents I most certainly would not have been Chinese.

As I said earlier, my father and uncles and myself were soldiers during the world wars and won our so called freedom.

It seems we kept out so called 'Evil Regimes' so as to allow England to be given away by people in positions of power who didn't even consider asking those "Wonderful People" who, through their bravery and stoicism, made it possible for them to sit in judgment of what, in their opinion, was best suited to keep them in the lofty positions they find themselves.

I travelled through France, Belgium, Holland and into Germany. Some of the people lined the roads and waved us through, many more didn't and so long as the war passed them by they were unconcerned. This begs the question- Why did we win and then give our own country away, then change our laws to accommodate them?

As I complete this summary the news has just been given that Mr Griffin of the British National Party has been cleared of racism on his second trial. This news was followed by a statement from Mr Brown, the Chancellor who said, "the law will have to be looked at."

Need I say anymore about what is happening to what was my country.

I remain,
Yours sincerely,

R.G.Price.
R.A.S.C.
1,Corp,
21st Army Group,
British 2nd Army.

Dear Mr. Pringle,

I came upon your letter in our local paper so you must have cast a wide net. Firstly good luck with your project (good opening gambit). I'm not quite sure what the main theme of your book is going to be and whether my views would come in your remit. I suppose I ought, in order not to waste too much of your time, to declare myself especially as others see me.

Most people consider me as a bit of a weirdo, on the basis that I'm not like them and tend to be very cynical following the theory that a cynic is an idealist whose life has been ruined by the behaviour of others. I'm a great people watcher. I'm always trying to work out why people behave as they do, but I usually end up still baffled. I hold an opinion on almost any subject and I'm not backward in giving it. My family say that I don't talk to people then listen. My daughter says I'm a control freak, although I note she doesn't do much that I tell her. At this stage you may decide not to read any further, thus showing an innate good taste. Please excuse the writing, my hands seem to be in revolt against my brain.

My life history so far is – eldest of seven children with an alcoholic father. We lived on the poverty line and I have spent a life time trying to drag myself out of the gutter. At the moment I am just peeping over the edge. The war took my youth and after it life was all a matter of going for the biggest penny, so I could support my family.

I spent 40 years as a steel erector because it paid the biggest wage, though I don't like heights. Needs must etc. I served nearly four years in the R.A.F. including the latter two years of the war. There I learnt self reliance and the fact that in the services you can't beat the system. The start of my cynicism started there then I found out that class division still existed and the only equality was in death. In air crews, for instance, an officer would get a Distinguished Flying Cross but a sergeant a Distinguished Flying Medal.

Airmen differed from the other two services in that we moved a lot between stations, and like the stone masons of old, we carried messages and information especially from abroad. I, for example, served on ten different airfields probably because I was looked on as a bit of a liability. I was a barrack room lawyer and officers had a good spy system. We would spend hours in our billets discussing the war and the false propaganda we were fed. We used to say we weren't prepared to return to the pre war system of poor hours, workhouses and families begging in the streets. We called Churchill the old war monger and most hated him. I like to think that we helped in our little way to bring about the welfare state. Unfortunately, life being what it is, when most people get their feet into life's brimming trough they become pigs themselves. Idealism doesn't get far in politics and people who say the wealth of the world should be divided have nothing to put in the pot.

I worked until I was nearly 70 and I'm sure things are better nowadays. I have a loving caring daughter and because my needs are not great I want for very little. I live by little saying as "Blessed is he that expects nothing for he shall not be disappointed." "A friend in need is a pain in the arse." I'm totally non religious, as I consider belief in mystical beings and events to be totally against what I consider to be plain common sense. I'm quite happy to see the religious maniacs slaughtering each other as long as they leave me alone. I read a great deal about religious beliefs and I love the Greek myths. I suppose I'm a total atheist though I do have a great belief in myself. Arrogance maybe, I try not to lie to people and I owe no one nothing following Mr Micawber's principles.

In spite of this diatribe I have to admit there are some nice people in this world, if only they had the power. As you well have noted I could go on endlessly fascinated

by the sound of my own voice. A voice crying out in the wilderness.

3009853

L.A.C. A Boughen

A.C.F.

R.A.F. V.R.

Dear Mr Pringle

Yes, I was in the 40's ending in dead legs to waist, smashed head, and stove in stomach and no ligaments in feet, plus NO Army disability pension. I left Army on crutches. No support for veterans. I was a driver class III - RASC. I enclose one of my poems.

D McCarthy

As a 40's Soldier I'm Crying

How do I know - for I'm not lying
These are from the Army, Navy and RAF
Just only now a few hundred left.
There were two thousand most have died
We were waiting for pensions but they lied
They regard us veterans as ticks in their hair
All that I say is honest and true.
Take our national papers they treat me like a Jew.
All through the ages Jews suffer nothing new.
I ask them to print our plight
"NO" was their answer - "Get out of our sight".
The country has changed from wartime to woes
It's now "Blow you lot - we're OK" now we're the foes.
By begging a pension -we've waited for years
Just even for me as one of them it's tears.
They hold tribunals, crooked and cheating
Just so our MOD won't be seen weeping.
Weeping? Not them they are so hard
This Government spends hundreds of millions every year
On strangers to our shores - works out dear
To all of us not a penny to share
So I send my true story. Hope YOU care.

Dear Mr Pringle

Responding to your invitation in last week's Reading Chronicle. I left school in 1934 at the age of 14. Jobs were in very short supply, due to the depression, but eventually via the good offices of an established employee of Heelas of Broad St. Reading I obtained work of a rather basic labouring nature, in the carpet department, a job which included wheeling bags of carpet and curtain scraps down to Jackson's scrap yard, on the Oxford Road (hoping that I didn't meet any of the girls that I knew!) The Heelas family were very socially conscious and although we often had no paying jobs for weeks, we were still kept on the 'books' and in my case at a wage of 5 shillings per week. (4/- for my mum and 1/- for a packet of twenty Players cigs, *for me not mum.)

In 1940 I received my call up to the Royal Artillery Signals (at Bamber Bridge, near Preston, Lancs) where I learnt some of the elements of electricity, telephony and radio. The first experience of active service deaths for me was in the North African campaign. The pilot of a shot up German Messerschmitt 109 had bailed out, his parachute opened, then to our mixed emotions, but mostly horror, his parachute harness failed and he plunged in hideous somersaults to the ground, with arms and legs wildly flaying. We all dashed to where we had fallen to see if there was anything we could do, with our novice second lieutenant shouting, "Take your rifles, he may be armed!" We gave Jerry a proper funeral which was presided over by our chaplain, with our improvised wooden cross surmounting his grave. We also arranged for his possessions to be sent to his family by the Red Cross.

In contrast, during the last desperate weeks of the European war zone, when the tide of battle ebbed and flowed almost daily, we could do no more than scrape a trench sufficiently deep in which to push the blackened, rotten remains of dead soldiers, often with maggots crawling from their gaping wounds, but whose loyalties were immaterial then. We were obliged to wear petrol soaked handkerchiefs round our faces in an attempt to mask the sickening stench.

The most moving experience perhaps was at Christmas in 1944 when we were 'holed up' at a farm in the shadow of the famous bridge at Nijmegen. We had received extra NAAFI Christmas goodies and parcels from home, but there was something missing until a Dutch lady appeared and offered to conduct a Christian religious service, which we were happy to accept. This included carols and appropriate Bible readings and so our Christmas was as complete as it could be. It was only later that we discovered the lady herself was an atheist.

At the end of the war, I with others was encouraged to sit for City and Guilds Exams in Telecomms. This I did and in 1946 presented myself for interview at the Post Office Telephones HQ in Reading. To cut a long story short and starting at the bottom, (mostly of very deep telephone pole holes), but by continuing my studies I climbed the ladder (yawn!) in all respects and retired in 1980 at management level. None of this would have been possible without my army service experience.

It is only in more recent years that I have been in a position to attend a number of British Legion functions and ceremonies.

Your Sincerely

Charlie Walton

Dear Sir,

For over fifty years this information was suppressed by the Admiralty. They were informed of the mutiny on HMS Sheffield and how serious it was. That was in 1943, I was on Arctic Convoy to Russia. We were in action with the battle cruiser, Scharnhorst on the 26th December, 1943. We hit the Scharnhorst, we hit and damaged the cruiser, Hipper and reduced the German destroyer, Friedrich Eckholdt to a burning shambles. We were also hit by HMS Norfolk, thinking we were the enemy. We also received damage outside of a turret. You could put two buses in the gaping hole in the deck, I was in a turret.

HMS Sheffield Log Book, 1943 ;

5th Dec - Sheffield left Plymouth for Scapa Flow.

8th Dec - After arriving at fleet anchorage, Rear Admiral Burnett cleared the lower deck to address the ship's company.

13th Dec - In company with HM Cruisers Norfolk and Belfast, the cruiser squadron steamed up to Seydisfjord before proceeding further north to the Barents Sea.

19th Dec - The cruiser squadron arrived at Kola Inlet.

20th Dec - After refuelling Sheffield, in company with HM Ships Duke of York, Norfolk, Belfast, Mauritius, Opportune, Matchless, Musketeer, Virago, Saumarez, Savage, Scorpion and Stord (Norwegian) steamed out of Kola Inlet. This force provided an outer escort to convoys JW55B & RA55A that sailed from Russia simultaneously to return to UK ports.

22nd Dec - Both convoys located by an enemy reconnaissance aircraft.

25th Dec - The German 11in pocket battleship Scharnhorst, together with 5 fleet destroyers put to sea to intercept the Allied convoy. The heavy seas running at the time caused Scharnhorst's escorting destroyers to reduce speed, the pocket battleship continuing to close the convoy alone.

26th Dec - 8.40am - Scharnhorst is detected by Belfast's radar. Norfolk, Belfast and Sheffield close to attack, forcing the enemy vessel to withdraw. 12.05pm - Scharnhorst re-approaches the British cruiser force. During the initial action HMS Norfolk was hit by 2 x 11in shells, whilst Sheffield survived a straddling from Scharnhorst's main armament. During the afternoon the battleship, Duke of York joined the action and began pounding the enemy ship. Scharnhorst was hit by at least 13 x 14in and 12 x 8in shells, plus no less than 11 torpedoes fired by the assembled cruisers and destroyers. Only 36 German survivors were recovered from the freezing waters. Sheffield hit and damaged Hipper and reduced hapless German Destroyer Friedrich Eckholdt.

28th Dec - During the return passage to Kola Inlet, a thanksgiving service was held on the quarterdeck after which Rear Admiral Burnett addressed the assembled company.

29th Dec - The cruiser left Russian waters to return to Scapa. Rapid alterations to the Ship's course were executed to prevent the cruiser colliding with the ice floes.

The captain was a Jekyll and Hyde, the conditions on the ship were appalling, the food was rotten and the root cause of the men's problem was the captain. He was a demon and detestable. One seaman hanged himself, he could not take any more. Most of the officers had no time for the captain, I can assure you. You had no-one to turn to, you could not contact the press. If you did, you would face a court martial. One seaman did this, his wife had died when we were at Gibraltar. The Captain said "I am letting you go but remember, duty comes before pleasure." I was there at that time and all hell was let loose. I can tell you that this seaman went to his MP and told him of the conditions we were under.

One petty officer was attacked with a knife and was injured in his foot. He was a bastard. After this the captain had two Royal Marines outside his cabin all night and were with him all the time when we mutinied in 1943, at Scapa Flow all the big battleships turned their guns on us. It was that serious that Prime Minister Churchill had to come to Scapa Flow to see the root cause of the men's problem. *(When Prime Minister Churchill came aboard, Alec later told me that he was booed and heckled by the crew, such was the anger aboard the ship.)* You will not read this in any history book. *(Although the Sheffield's logbook omits specific cases of unrest, some Admiralty documents show that 'Their Lordships' were aware of general feelings of discontent on many ships in the fleet during 42/43. In 1944 they issued a top secret guide entitled 'Mutiny in the Royal Navy' with some handy tips on how to quell a rebellion including - the establishment of a 'citadel' in a suitable part of the ship, which can be readily defended, to act as a rallying point for loyal elements and a base of operation to regain control of the situation. The most likely causes of a mutiny it pointed out were internally, poor food and conditions and irksome routines and external factors eg. cancellation of leave without evident reason, irregular mail, apparent discrimination between different ships and alleged injustice in pay or allowances.)*

As an 83 year old veteran, the VE day celebrations did not mean a thing to me because of the way the Government treat me and my generation, and I'm sure my feelings are shared by thousands of my comrade's who are still living, and those who died we remember quietly in our hearts.

At the end of the Second World War we were jubilant, but 60 years on we are in despair, struggling to live in our own country. Also, my wife is in residential care and I have to go and see her by bus because I cannot afford a car. What sort of society denies it elderly generation enough money to buy a car, even a modestly priced car? All we can do is to pay bills and eat. There is a sickness in our society, pensioners being treated like this, but that still celebrates the end of World War Two. It is hypocrisy.

Yours Sincerely

A Alexander

(Alec was later in action giving shell fire cover to the Salerno Landings and also off Sword beach on D-Day, shelling inland and witnessed the troops going ashore. He can remember shot down German pilots being wrapped in the German flag. The ships Padre would give them a brief funeral, then the bodies were slipped overboard from the hangar deck with cannonballs tied to their head and feet. His house in London was destroyed in the blitz and on one naval journey a large heavy sheet of metal fell on him in a heavy storm. He was taken to an American military hospital

in Reykjavik. He was blind for a few weeks, his jaw was shattered, was fed through tubes and had other broken bones.)

Dear Nick,

I am writing in answer to your advert in Saga magazine. I am 83, now a widower. I was called up in 1942 and sent to Canterbury. It was a brand new barracks quite near the cathedral. I did six weeks infantry training in the General Service Corp then sent to Shoeburyness in Essex where I entered the 22nd Anti Tank Artillery. I then moved on to the 99th Anti Tank Artillery. They then disbanded all anti tank units and I was sent to a holding unit of the East Surrey's.

In 1944 I came home for a couple of weeks and got married. I joined a convoy which sailed to Italy where I joined the 6th Royal West Kent's, just after the fall of Caserta where the monastery was bombed. In September we spent 2 months rest in Egypt. When we left Italy we were up to our knees in mud, so the sunshine of Egypt was very welcome.

When the war finished in Italy we went across the Alps into Austria. We had the job of looking after Russian prisoners who had been fighting with the Germans. After a few weeks we were taken back down to Naples. We all split up and went to different places. I was sent to Greece where I joined the Essex 4th Indian division, where I had a nice office job. I came home for a months leave, but on return some of them were going back to India. I didn't fancy that, so I was sent back to Athens where they were doing guard duties. I didn't like that either so asked to go on a cookery course. I was then sent back to Italy where I spent 6 weeks in an Italian barracks learning to cook. I went back to Greece cooking for seventy men on short rations. I was demobbed in February 1947 and returned home to find everywhere ankle deep in snow, but glad to be back.

Stan Heath

Dear Mr Pringle,

I am writing in answer to your letter in the Whitby Gazette asking war veterans to give their opinions of Britain today, (I have a War Veterans Badge), so here goes:-

I am now 84 years of age and served as a Private in the Second Independent Parachute Brigade around the Mediterranean:- North Africa, Italy, Greece and Palestine occasionally "dropping in" on parties unexpectedly. On two occasions fighting terrorists.

When war is nigh

"God and the soldier"

Is the nations cry.

When war is over

And nations wrongs are righted
God is forgotten
And the soldier is slighted. HOW VERY TRUE.

We were led to believe we were risking our lives and fighting for “a land fit for heroes”, but it turns out to be a land fit for drug-pushers, illegal immigrants, scroungers, paedophiles and greedy people.

Recently in the North of England an illegal cannabis farm was discovered so large it took four people to tend to it – illegal immigrants and were not a lot of cockle pickers on the Solway Firth illegal immigrants? A lady interviewed on television and had cancer through no fault of her own but the N.H.S. would not supply life-saving drugs for her. Now had she been a junkie the story would be different. There are plenty of drugs available on the N.H.S. for self-inflicted drug users.

From time to time those in authority give grants to improve one's home. The first question is “Are you on benefits?” Reply “No I have saved my money” “Then we can't help you”. (I was stupid enough to believe in the saying “save for a rainy day.”) Thank goodness my grandson is spending his money on the things he wants and does not save. The Government will look after him and his family.

As for children! I was allowed to wander freely unaccompanied through fields, meadows, county lanes and woods without fear. Nowadays children are assaulted and dumped naked in a snow-covered alley. Many children no longer show respect to their elders. e.g. schoolteachers attacked and sworn at. Children referring to adults by their first names, putting themselves on an equal footing with adults, an unheard of thing when I was younger. I have a niece in her 60's who cannot break the habit of calling me “Uncle,” yet a TEN-year old child calls me by first name, of which I distinctly disapprove. As for greed – we were satisfied for Christmas and birthday presents with the simple things in life but today's children require expensive computers, digital cameras, game boys and other expensive things.

When I was younger capital punishment existed so no murderer committed the same offence twice. With the abolishment of capital punishment mass murders take place as there is no fear of dire consequences. When caught it is a life free of worry in a prison full of luxuries (games rooms, television etc.) free meals and no money worries. Is it any wonder we have a gun and knife culture? Hardly a week goes by without some media story of shooting or stabbing; sometimes of innocent people by mistake. In the Army I was given a gun and a knife for my own protection but after the war these were handed back as I had no further use for them and, of course, prisoners get compensation if anyone infringes their ‘human rights’ regardless of the fact that their victims have no ‘human rights’

In my younger days before this ‘liberated society’ if a girl became pregnant she was sent faraway ‘to look after a sick relative’ until after the baby was born and adopted. Now we hear about umpteen teenage pregnancies many involving school pupils.

In old films even married couples were not allowed to be seen in the same bed. It had to be separate beds with a bedside table separating them. In this liberated society

every soap opera has couples single, married or adulterous apparently performing the sex act. We are often warned some programmes contain `strong language`. Don't they mean obscene or foul language? To think that in that great film "Gone with the Wind" the film censors warned that they must not use swear words so they wanted to cut out the immortal final line "Quite frankly my dear, I don't give a damn". (It contained a swear word.)

There seems to be a new breed of solicitors springing up all over the country. The `no win – no fee` type. If someone is clumsy enough to trip out side it's a case for compensation and what happened to the once proud claim "Made in Britain". Now everything I buy is "Made in China".

When I hear someone singing "What a Wonderful World" I wonder what planet they are living on – possibly cuckoo land or some fools paradise.

Well, I have got that off my chest so I wonder if I qualify for "Grumpy Old Men"
Good Luck.

Yours faithfully

Anon

P.S. I prefer to remain anonymous as I like the shape of my car as it is and cannot afford to replace broken windows.

Dear Nick,

Your letter regarding our country has just been published in our local newspaper TIMES CITIZEN and what follows I hope will convey to you my thoughts of the past and what I consider fundamental for the future.

Looking back over the last 60 years I am utterly disappointed with the country at the moment and unless something substantial be forthcoming this country will degenerate even further. Yes, degenerate! This is not the country which my colleagues fought for and I feel ashamed at the state of affairs now upon us.

I agree that a lot has been achieved, but at what cost! Our currency has been devalued directly to my knowledge three times, but still the pound is nowhere it should be on the money markets, consequently everything we have bought has been heavily inflated, especially the cost of housing. We are given a lot of hooey about supply and demand yet even now prices are still rising on property. This, in my opinion, is scandalous as it does not give the younger people any encouragement to own their houses unless they are able to take out mortgages far and above their normal commitments. I feel estate agents are largely to blame here, despite what they might say.

The cost of food in general is appalling. No suggestions on help is forthcoming from higher authorities to encourage us to grow our own food wherever practicable.

This happened during the war, but was never kept up.

I served in the ROYAL AIR FORCE 1942 – 1947, and am still very proud that I was able to do so. I was one of the lucky ones to have come through without a scratch. I was LEADING AIRCRAFTSMAN FITTER/MECHANIC servicing planes in North Africa and Germany. Looking back again, I often wonder if I could have bettered myself by staying on in the force, but fate decided otherwise. Civvy street was no problem for me, as a vacancy was already available at my old firm. It was a struggle for me as I had no home to go to after I was de-mobed, so consequently I had to find lodgings.

Having met quite a lot of people of my own age, they have all agreed that this country has not turned out as they would have wished. We were all proud to be BRITISH, whether we lived in Scotland, Wales or Ireland but not any longer. We are shocked to see the number of foreigners in our country, with possibly more to come. We feel enough is enough. This does not mean we should kick them out, but encourage them to return to their own countries to help build up their own resources.

Regarding all those who lost their lives in the Second World War, I am sure they would be ashamed the way the country has become. We have certainly had a variety of governments over the years, none of which could be recommended. The mess we are in is awful and we are continually told improvements will be forthcoming in the future. What a hope! The N.H.S. is in a turmoil, the HOME OFFICE is a shambles and no improvements for an overall policy on transport facilities have come to light.

What we need today is a LEADER OF THE NATION like we had during the war, where obstacles were overcome and progress was made. We had to have this as we were fighting for our very existence, so why not now? We have leaders of political parties who do not always go with the wishes of the people. Very good speech makers, but not much action. I am not a member of any political party, but even now the present government are glossing over the cracks, so as to offer themselves to be winners at the next General Election.

If things go on as they are today, I shudder to think what our grandchildren will have to put up with. If only we could stand on our own two feet and not run with or run after other countries, this would be more than welcome!

Yours sincerely,
Alfred T. Marsh.

Dear Mr Pringle,

I enlisted in the Royal Air Force Jan.1938. I gave notice to my employer (F. Atkinson of Hull) Dec. 1937. My father was most upset and declared "You have made your bed, so lie on it". I was posted to NO.80 (F) Squadron in Egypt Nov. 1938 and saw service in the Middle East until Nov. 1942.

I married a lady in the W.A.A.F. on 8-4-1944, I had 2 girls during my marriage. I served in West Africa (Gold Coast), now Ghana, and later in the Far East and twice in R.A.F. Aden. I was finally discharged from the R.A.F. from H.Q. FIGHTER COMMAND

July 1968.

I commenced civilian work as a Dept. Registrar Aug 1968. Later I joined the Borough Surveyors Dept. until Dec 1980. The main reason I departed from civilian work was ill health. Apart from the normal health surgery, we (ex service-men) had no support, unless one asked for it (i.e. B. Legion). Now (22-09-2006 @1600hrs), I wonder if all the effort of the men of the three services who died was worthwhile?

Today we have a Prime Minister and his Scottish cronies, who have led us into a hopeless war in IRAQ and worse, into a dreadful situation in AFHGANISTAN `never ending`. During W.W.II, 55,000 R.A.F. aircrew died whilst on bombing missions. The cream of this country died in vain! Merchant Seamen and the Royal Navy gave their lives in the Atlantic. Thousands of American G.I's and our British Army fought on the beaches and died.

Today & tonight – we have gangs of lawless youngsters roaming the streets causing TROUBLE & VIOLENCE, instead of RESPECT, the police are not up to “IT”. A system of NO TOLERANCE should have been introduced many years ago.

(a) To recap- did I struggle to adjust in 1968?

Answer – NOT really, but I devoted my working life to earning a living wage to support a family and try to save for a rainy day

(b) Was there support for ex-service men?

Yes – if one was desperate and allowed S.S.F.A. or a WELFARE person to pry into your life. (BRITISH LEGION & OTHER AGENCIES).

I hope the contents assist you with your findings.

My own service was as follows:

Promoted to Sgt. In the M.E. 1942.

Came home Nov. 1942 to H.Q. MAINTENANCE CMD.

WEST AFRICA JAN. 1945-1947.

AIR MINISTRY to 1950 – then as FLIGHT SGNT. To GENERAL SERVICE TRAINING (INSTRUCTOR) R.A.F. HEREFORD

Promoted to WARRANT OFFICER 1952

Posted to SIGNALS CENTRE FAREAST 1955-58

Posted to WHITE WALTHAM 1958-61

Posted to R.A.F. CHURCH FENTON 1961-63 and then ADEN

March 1965 to H.Q. FIGHTER CMD. As W.O.(STAFF) finished JULY 1968.

Yours sincerely

Chas. Arras Scarbro

FORMER WARRANT OFFICER R.A.F.

Dear Sir,

In answer to your letter from this Advertiser, I will write a little on your comments.

Firstly, born in Ipswich 13th Nov 1916, I am now reaching 90yrs of age. My service started in 1933 at Cardinton nr. Bedford in the Royal Airforce receiving 2p per day, finishing in 1968. I was at lots of bases, England, Scotland, Nr. Ireland, Lockerne, Eniskillen, then North Africa, 4yrs Bircham Newton Abington and Marham. That is a brief account.

About England, is it better or worse? Well under Labour or you could say Mr Blair and before him, the worst days work, common market over 30yrs, law and order out the window. Never see a policeman, 2/3 children can't read or write. Criminal damage, this town alone, not a big place 167 each week, you musn't get old, vindicated all the time, full of drugs, no action and stabbings everyday. I am sorry.

Late 1943 North Africa (now Algeria), Mr Churchill said to us, return to England you have done a good job, a land of milk and honey. Now here it is like the United Nations, full of illegal immigrants.

Well to me England is no good and that is why 6 months of the year I live in Spain. I have memories from when I was 4 years old, seen a lot and watched England go to pieces.

Yours sincerely,
E. H. Keeble.

Dear Mr Pringle,

I am now 80 years old and I'm getting more frustrated with the path my country appears to be taking, i.e. an open door policy on immigration, asylum etc. To accommodate all these races and religions the native Britons are being forced to tone our freedom of speech, our very way of life and now our very identity is under threat by the New Labour. (political correctness, human rights, equal opportunities, racism etc. etc.)

Our country was already overcrowded in 1946 with a population of 46,356,000 living on 94,633 sq. miles of land. With Vera Lynne's 'White Cliffs of Dover', If we could have seen in 1939 what this once proud and patriotic island would become in 2006 no one would have bothered to 'answer the call.' We should all be ashamed, that having fought two World Wars to protect our island and our way of life, our freedom of speech that our political leaders have lied to us. We now have a country that is a lawless, multi cultural hell hole. Our villages, towns and cities are crime and drug infested. Our immigrants have brought with them their own cultures of crime, drugs and guns etc and have no intention of adapting to the country and its way of life. What would our fallen comrades of two World Wars have thought about that? Also that there are over 3 million Asians probably occupying the homes they left never to return to!

I volunteered for the army at 17 years of age for "come what may" the month

before D Day. With today's society, many youths of that age are mugging old ladies, kicking down doors and heads, are out of work, on drugs, fathering children stealing cars and costing the tax payer millions. At the end of the war in Europe we were sent to India and the North West Frontier Kashmir. It was during 'Partition' when the new Pakistan was given half of the Indian Punjab that the Muslims swept in and so began the slaughter between Hindu, Sikh and Muslim, which cost millions of lives and was worse than Iraq or Rwanda because no explosives or machine guns were used, just pure hatred of each other using knives, swords, sticks, stones, fire and water. They were not adverse to locking hundreds of men, women and children in buildings to be burnt alive! We left on Indian Independence day August 14th 1947, to the Indian males on the dockside screaming "GO HOME – GO HOME!" These people have been allowed to settle here in the 1950's uncontrolled, with no health checks or suitability to integrate etc. Pakistan's, Hindu's with equal rights as ourselves and our welfare system N.H.S. etc. This cannot be right!.

I have been writing to my local M.P. for the last 6 or 7 years warning of the dangers of our Asian immigrants, Muslims in particular. Since my first letter we have had 9/11, Bali bombings, Spanish, 7/7 with the ongoing promise there is more to come. HOW LONG BEFORE THEY GIVE US A BESLAN SCHOOL SIEGE? Yet no one gets deported. Our government lets them stay to rant and rave as we witnessed 60 odd years ago. Please find cuttings and opinions of Nottingham, how it was in our day compared to the lawless, drug fuelled, gun culture, multi cultured hell hole of today.

Almost all who married during the war years, unless they were lucky, would have had to live with their parents and bring up children in cramped conditions (no bathroom, outside toilet etc.) Returning servicemen and women would not get a house of their own until the 50's. I married in 1948 and had a 3 and 4 year old in rooms. Rationing lasted until the early 50's including having to be registered with a coal merchant for our fuel. We did look forward to the new world we were promised on the domestic front by our politicians :- health service, social security, pensions, full time regular work and 'Cradle to the Grave' no more pre war industrial strife etc. Work House.

In 1946 uncontrolled immigration began by the Atlee Government, and carried on by the Conservatives. People from our foreign colonies, having emptied their counties of whites, now began to arrive here, having put 'nothing in yet they were entitled to receive the same benefits and health care without medical checks, screening for their suitability to settle in our island.' Immigration in one form or another that we have now reached crisis point, that we the native Britons are now in danger of losing our identity. Everywhere ordinary people are unhappy at what is going on around them. In some towns English is the second or third language. The four native tribes of our island are in danger. I live in the hope that as I saw 250 years of the British working, living, fighting and dying, being born in the Indian Sub Continent, ending in my two years from 1945 – 1947, that all our unwanted migration of about 60 race and religions, settled here can be reversed in the same amount of time ie. 2 years!! I can think of no other country in recent history, the native Americans and Palestine excepted, who have allowed such immigration that their native population would become second class

citizens, the same of which is happening in our Island.

Regt. May 1944 – Jan 1946 Green Howards.

Regt. Jan 1946 Royal Norfolk Regt. India.

Regt. Dec 1948 North West Frontier Province.

Yours faithfully

D. Stanton

Dear Mr Pringle,

I refer to your recent letter in the Brighton & Hove Argus asking for “opinions” from WW2 veterans about life in the UK today.

By way of introduction about myself, as an 18 year old living in South London, in April 1939 I joined the local T.A. unit which was 98th Field Regiment R.A. (Surrey Yeomanry). I attended a training camp held at Larkhill and was called up for war service on 1st September. As I was under 19 years old I was not sent to France and so missed the horrors of Dunkirk. I was then posted to a new regiment which had been formed, the 74th Medium Regiment R.A. (Surrey & Sussex Yeomanry), together with some of the remaining members of the original T.A. unit and recalled reservists etc. I spent the next 4 years on training and defence duties in the south eastern counties of England. In the early days we were issued with guns that could not be fired owing to their age!

In January 1943 we sailed from Liverpool for North Africa to join the American 1st Army. When this campaign ended we spent several months training and then, in September, we took part in the 2nd part of Salerno landings in southern Italy and supported both the 5th and 8th armies, including the battles to capture Cassino. In Italy we spent the remaining days of the war and then waited to be demobbed. For me this took place in June 1946 having reached the exalted rank of (L/Bdr) (lance bombardier) and one of the more fortunate ones with no injuries.

I was also lucky in having my old job waiting for me in the electricity supply industry. I was employed with this company until I retired in March 1981 and this was generally an enjoyable time to work without having to look over your shoulder to see if you still have a job as many workers have to do today.

It would be true to say that, having spent nearly 7 years fighting for freedom, it is a disappointment to see how things have worked out in present day Great Britain. It appears that people are no longer allowed to express an opinion and everybody has to be politically correct. Even people defending themselves or their property sometimes these days are blamed by the police and the attacker gets away with it!

Great things are expected of our armed services who are put in dangerous positions giving them poor pay and equipment. Nothing changes!

The behaviour of some young people with their use of drugs and drink combined with violence with knives and guns is a sad reflection on life in modern day

Great Britain and compares badly with some other countries.

Regrettably, my comments are rather depressing and those who did not come back after giving their lives for a better world would be disappointed.

Yours sincerely,
Ken Cooper.

Dear Mr Pringle

I read your letter in my local paper, the Brighton Evening Argus. I was in the RAF during the 39-45 war as a navigator. However, let us start with events in 1939. When war broke out in the September of that year, I was a couple of months short of my 16th birthday. When the days of the phoney war was over and the Germans had overrun most of Europe, Churchill realised that Germany's next step would be the invasion of our island. He set up a Local Defence Volunteer Force (known by most as the Look, Duck and Vanish Brigade). I immediately volunteered. This organisation was subsequently changed to the Home Guard (Dad's Army). We were issued with Army uniforms and were required to attend once per week to guard vital areas, apart from the training we received at other times during the week. However, as my 18th birthday approached, I asked to be released from the Home Guard as I wished to volunteer to go into aircrew along with my immediate friends. In order to achieve my aims it was considered necessary to enlist in the local Air Training Squadron which would greatly help me in my ambition. This was agreed, but I had to do fire watching at my place of employment, once per week.

Eventually I received my order to register for military service, which I did and I stated that I wished to serve in aircrew in the RAF. In October, 1942 I had to attend an RAF medical centre in London. I was ordered to report to Lord's Cricket Ground on 8th March, 1943. There had been a twelve month wait previously from the time of acceptance to call up but the powers that be decided to reduce it. By reducing the call up time by over six months it was possible to give the new intake six months education in maths, geography, mechanical drawing etc. The course I attended was at the Tooting Technical College in South London. These courses known as P.A.C.T (Pre Air Crew Training). We all passed, were given a weeks leave and had to report to I.T.W (Initial Training Wing) No. 7 at Newquay, Cornwall.

During this leave I was lucky enough to have the company of a close friend who was a wireless operator/air gunner. He was several months older than myself and his training was not as long as those in the category known as aircrew cadet P.N.B (pilot, navigator, bomb aimer). My friend was already on ops and was flying in Sterlings (These aircraft I subsequently learned were known in the RAF as flying coffins). He told me that this tour (The first tour was 30 ops, then six months break and the second tour was 20 ops) was a sinch as they had flown their 13th op the previous Thursday. We enjoyed our leave and travelled back to London together, parting at Victoria, he to go to Liverpool Street Station for his journey to camp, whilst I had to go to Paddington for my

trip to Cornwall. The following week I received a letter from my mother stating that my friend was missing believed killed. I later learned that he was shot down near Hanover whilst on a bombing mission to Bremen. He is buried in a war grave at Hanover. The next oldest in our quartet of friends became a flight engineer and carried out 65 ops, including 15 with P.F.F, he got the D.F.M. The youngest pal became a Wop/AG, but like myself he finished his training just as the war finished. I was eventually posted to a holding unit with three other would be navigators. After hanging around and being deployed to operational airfields, we were eventually sent to Canada for our flying training.

After an eight day zigzag crossing in the Ile De France, we arrived in New York early April, 1944. We travelled by train to Monkton in New Brunswick and that was a very pleasant journey. Monkton was another holding unit but eventually we were dispatched to No.1 Air Observers Unit at Malton, which is now the international airport at Toronto. After we were awarded our brevets and stripes at a public parade, we were given two weeks leave and had to report back to Monkton. Without exception, the lads spent their leave in New York and shopped for Christmas presents to take to war torn Britain. Early December, 1944, we travelled to Halifax, Nova Scotia and boarded the S.S Mauritania which was already heavily loaded with American troops. After a pretty rough crossing the ship docked at Liverpool on Boxing Day, the previous day we were dished up with the most horrible Christmas dinner I have ever had. I joined a crew who with the exception of the bomb aimer, were Australians and they proved to be a great bunch of chaps.

We expected to be sent to the Far East but the completion of our course pretty well coincided with the Japs throwing in the towel. All the crews were called together and we were informed that the Aussies would be repatriated as soon as possible and RAF personnel with some time to go would be trained on ground duties. I became an air movement assistant and was sent to the Gold Coast (now Ghana) for seven months. In January, 1947 my demob papers came through and by the end of that month I was demobbed. The winter of 1947 was very severe with snow day after day and after a couple of weeks I got bored, so much so that I in touch with my former employer to ascertain whether I could return to work. I was informed that I could start on the 8th March, exactly 4 years since I had reported to Lord's Cricket Ground.

I am now retired and although my wife died some years ago, I am able to find enough to keep me busy and keep the grey matter working. One of my pet pastimes is writing to my M.P regarding my three pet subjects ie.crime, health and education. On crime I have pointed out to him that most of the problems that this country is facing is due to a severe lack of discipline. I have suggested harsher deterrents are required including the return of the death penalty for murder, corporal punishment for the yobs, the birch for those under 18 and the cat-o-nine tails over 18. In addition, prison terms should have strict working conditions and not the holiday camp conditions that a lot of ex cons boast about. In schools, those who who play truant or behave in a disruptive manner should be given the tawse. A lash across the palm of the hand with the leather tongs kept most unruly lads of my generation in line. My M.P replied to my letter on this subject, informing me that it would not be possible to return to those brutal

methods. In my reply I reminded him of a number of very brutal cases that have occurred in recent months. I also informed him that I realise we will never get rid of crime as there is always those who think they are fireproof and will never get caught, but the harsher deterrents will help to substantially reduce the level of crime.

I am mindful of the effect that banned drugs have on crime figures and appreciate the efforts of the Anti Drug Squad in reducing the use of drugs. Alcohol is also a factor in the crime figures and the government has expressed concern in respect of the consumption of liquor by the population of all ages, not only so far as crime is concerned but on the future effect of alcohol related illness will have on the Health Service. The idiots in the Governments think tank seem to be of the opinion that by extending the drinking hours from those which were introduced in the First World War to all day opening of bars, will resolve the problem. It seems to me that the rot started after the debacle of the Suez Canal event in 1956 and steadily got worse during the 60's and 70's.

I should also mention the events which occurred between 1979 and 1997. During that period the Pound was devalued, we lost a lot of our heavy industry and essential services were privatised. It was explained that privatisation would provide competition and reduce cost. How can this apply to railways and the water industry when the operators of those are confined to areas. When I was a lad the British motor car and motor cycle industries were British owned, we still make those vehicles but they are controlled by foreign owners. This is a nation which built ships like the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, now our ships are built by foreigners and even overhauls have been sent abroad.

Another trend the Government has failed to stop, is sending work overseas where labour is cheaper. Those who are made redundant by those actions are thrown onto the dole queue and the tax payer has to support them while the management of those firms concerned, reap the profit.

The cost of housing is at a ludicrous high level, due to the shortage of property, yet we still invite hundreds of thousands of immigrants to come to this comparatively small island. Not many have a knowledge of our language, there is also a fair sprinkling of crooks amongst them. If all those immigrants returned to their country of origin, there would be many vacant properties and the housing market would at least stabilise or fall.

Some of these immigrants are of the Islamic faith and they seem to be hell bent on altering our way of life to favour them. All immigrants should be told that they are entering Britain and whilst they have freedom of speech and religion they must accept our way of life and interference into that will not be tolerated and they will be deported. Frankly I love my country, but there are a number of aspects about present day living which I abhor. I'm not racist as I have worked with Indians, Pakistanis, African, Americans, Poles, Australians and Canadians, and I have always got on well with those people.

Yours Sincerely
Name Withheld

Dear Mr Pringle,

Firstly let me apologise for using pencil, I find my writing tends to flow easier by so doing.

Here goes;- I was born on 22nd Oct 1921 strangely enough in Newcastle upon Tyne but of West Midlands parents and lived for the first five to six years of my life in the village of Catton, near Allendale.

I enlisted in the Army on the 2nd July 1936 for a period of 12 years with the colours (i.e. the 12 years starting on my 18th birthday) and enlisted as an apprentice artificer (The role of an Artificer is to fix and maintain electrical and mechanical equipment), Royal Artillery, being based at Woolwich up to the commencement of war. Without going into further details I was employed on virtually all military equipment, strangely enough in this order radar, wireless communications, artillery i.e. guns up to coast defence, vehicles up to and including battle tanks. I was firstly an electrician fire control (a secret way of saying radar mechanic) then became an artificer gun REME (The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers was formed in October 1942. It is usually referred to as 'The Reemee'. Major William Russell served in the corps during World War Two and would later become one half of the company Russell Hobbs. He invented the world's first automatic electric kettle, that would switch off once the water was boiled, in 1955.))and immediately post war, artificer gun/ veh REME. For most of my man service I was a warrant officer. (Mr Bellamy joined the army when he was just 14, this was known as 'boy service')

With my technical knowledge and experience I naturally had no trouble obtaining a job in civil life, my first as a Quality Engineer with Rolls Royce Aero Division Derby, then to a large boiler manufacturer in Derby, thirdly to a medium sized company engaged in the petro/chemical Industry as their Contracts Manager. I finally finished my working life as a project manager handling large multi million pound contracts for an International American run company based in London.

My war experience was nothing particularly notable, the first year or two being in Ack Ack maintaining and repairing radar etc. at which I was quite capable. I then re mustered onto general engineering i.e. guns etc. On completion of the war in 1945, I was posted to the Middle East, mostly in Palestine, where the situation was similar to that in Iraq and Afghanistan today. We were then up against the IZL (Irgun Zvai Leumi) and the Stern Gang (Two groups fighting for a Jewish state). I again re mustered as an artificer vehicles, REME and was later mentioned in despatches. You will no doubt appreciate that in REME, in addition to periods in various workshops, we also had periods with other arms. I, in fact, had periods with Artillery Tank Regiments and Royal Engineers (not mechanical but more civil engineers.)

Now and finally to the U.K. In 2006 we are now engaging in a comparison with yesteryear and today, it is not easy to do so.

As a young child at Catton I can remember that we were poor, in fact very very poor. It would be the mid twenties the earliest I can remember. Our house was one up

and one down, the toilet one of a battery of toilets down the gardens, and our clothes were invariably hand downs. My father out of work (due to his employer being bankrupt) had rejoined the army, as an artificer R.A. There were originally three of us in the one up and one down, my sister arriving a few years later, my older brother being my best friend as well as brother. A little story worth repeating – I found half a crown in the street which my mother changed for a new shiny penny, wealth indeed for my mother. It always gives me pleasure to look back on that event. We then moved to Fort Brockhurst, near Gosport and our living conditions somewhat improved and finally our last move as a complete family was to Larkhill, a large military camp.

Looking back at life in those days tends to produce a sadness about what, as a nation, we have lost in the intervening years. No doubt there have been improvements, such as poverty which has been virtually eliminated. Few normal people face hunger, never mind starvation. Most of us have a car or suitable alternative transport. The days of the wireless are numbered, switch on the telly, watch that until we go to bed. To eat, open the tin or packet whatever. Be quiet I am watching so and so, I could go on endlessly.

Yes we have to a degree lost the art of self entertainment, discussions, exercise (how many fat people did you see prior to the war, I can think of none.) The local bobby kept us on the straight and narrow, but he was also a help and a friend. The police today we only see in their cars waiting to catch you for the slightest misdemeanour. He is no longer a friend, just someone you want nothing to do with, in my opinion a fatal situation and the consequences of which are most serious if not fatal to society.

I think that prior to the war and during the war we were most definitely a homogeneous and Christian nation. If we had been otherwise the war would have been lost and the world entirely different. I regret to say it but it has to be said, we are no longer an homogeneous and Christian nation and despite what our “correct” politicians say we are not and probably never will be again. I believe immigrants have come here without knowing the code of practice and living which we want or require. This political fault is to the detriment of ALL of US. Do you doubt that the London Bombings and other problems are the result of the inadequacies of past and present politicians?

H.B Bellamy

P.S. I am somewhat hard of hearing, due I think to gunfire.

Dear Mr Pringle,

I wrote my original letter some few days ago, closed the letter and stamped the envelope but the more I thought about what I had written the more I thought it could be interpreted as racist.

I do not consider this to be true and would draw your attention to the editorial of the Daily Mail of Saturday Oct 28th 2006 page 14 and headed “THIS CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE”

I believe that this country is no longer that in which I was born and brought up. I too have considered emigrating and, but for my age 85, would do so. This after being as pro British as is possible.

I believe that the rate of immigration to this country has been grossly excessive and we are no longer the homogeneous race which brought us to such high prominence. Who is to blame? I think directly our politicians who considered short term advantages, i.e. money and ignored the long term effects.

H.B. Bellamy

Dear Mr Pringle,

I am so sorry to be so long in replying to your letter in the Alnwick Gazette, but I have been trying to gather my opinions on how life has changed since I was discharged from the W.A.A.F. that frankly I do not know where to begin.

The whole ethos of this country has changed. We were a manufacturing country and were known for quality. Even in clothing, the best garments and shoes were made in England and we were proud of that. Now people appear satisfied with cheap shoddy throw away goods. Then we looked for good material and well made things that would last. Nowadays people do not want things to last, hence the shortage of landfill sites.

I have good furniture that I have had since the early days of my marriage, my younger family members buy something new just to be fashionable- whether they can afford it or not! Years ago if people got into debt, they were ashamed of it and it was often because they just did not have enough money to live on. Nowadays it is because they want everything they see whether they need it or not.

We were brought up to live within our means and save for our old age. Now we are suffering for it. Those who try to be responsible and self reliant are ignored. Those who are content to live off the state (the tax-payers) get all the benefits.

I do realise that in today's high cost of living economy both partners need to earn, but I am saddened by the effect this has on the children. Many are unloved, undisciplined, uncared for and, to make up for this, given too much money. I am sure many parents feel guilty about the lack of time they spend with their children and get into debt giving them such expensive presents. No wonder they grow up feeling that the world owes them a living.

How have so many of today's young people become so rude, abusive and downright violent towards the elderly and each other? At one time discipline was the responsibility of family, society and police. Now everyone is afraid of repercussions as children know their rights. I thought their rights and responsibility lay with the family.

The church, once the backbone of society, in an effort to appear more liberal and "with it" has abandoned the teachings of the Bible. The law is no longer looked upon as just – teachers and doctors are not respected as they once were and members of parliament are ridiculed. They have lost the respect of the population through spin and downright lying.

I am horrified at the way our troops have been treated. How must their parents, wives and families feel to know that they are operating under such hazardous conditions, in such a harsh climate, so ill equipped and the poorest paid in Europe?

What do I think of a country that can keep 7,000,000 people unemployed and yet let millions of illegal immigrants claim benefits, but can't organise a good education system, good hospitals and care for its elderly and disabled properly? I am ashamed of it. I am 85 years of age and I can remember the great depression of the 1920-1930's. People really were hungry then, children ran around in bare feet, even in the winter. There should not be any talk of poverty these days. If children are in poverty, it is because the parents mis-spend their benefits on drink and drugs.

I am sorry if this sounds like a diatribe, which I suppose it is, but when you look back to the post war days, when rationing was severe, people just got on with it, living their lives, bringing up their families on small wages, but with the support of caring extended families, without getting into debt or protesting about their circumstances. Where has this spirit gone? I am pleased to say that in Amble where I now live the families are very close and supportive. The men are real family men and good with the children. I enjoy seeing them out with their children, often 3 generations together.

I hope you don't think I am an embittered old lady. In actual fact I enjoy my life and have quite a nice varied social life. I read a daily paper and watch the news on T.V. and find it totally depressing.

Yours sincerely
Beatrice Laverty

Dear Mr. Pringle

In response to your request in our local newspaper. I was in the Metropolitan Police in 1938 and, in the Autumn, we did training in gas attack, wearing respirators in gas conditions whilst trenches were being dug in Hyde Park. Obviously war was anticipated however unprepared we were. On the Friday night before war was declared I was on night duty 10pm to 6am Saturday. On Saturday morning I was awakened at 11am and told I was late turn that day, 3 to 11pm, and parade at 9am on Sunday for transfer to H (Limehouse) Division. So began my sojourn in the London Dock area north of the Thames until I was moved away in March 1941.

The blitz arrived the afternoon of the first Saturday in September 1940. Prior to that enemy planes had frequented the sky and the occasional bomb dropped but they had little opposition. The searchlights would comb the sky and sometimes catch one in the beams but the plane invariably carried on into unlit sky. That Saturday I was at the entrance to Rotherhithe Tunnel to control traffic motor vehicles that could pass through but no horses or pedestrians. Once a war raid alert was received the tunnel was closed – this was the situation when I arrived at 2pm.

Soon after that a wave of aircraft – possibly over a hundred – approached from the south-east but turned off east down the river. A similar wave followed and turned

off east. A third wave came on but did not turn off. Then all hell was let loose with high-explosive and incendiary bombs falling everywhere. I had not seen an incendiary bomb before and had no idea what to do with the first unexploded one I saw. I saw a soldier and asked him and his response was "where's the drink?" I promptly threw it into the canal. Later these incendiaries became familiar, and one occasion, when I was cycling around an area to estimate the number of bombs that had fallen there that night, I returned to the station with half a dozen unexploded ones tucked in my tunic. We were relieved from the tunnel entrance at 3am on the Sunday and taken to the station where we were held on reserve until dismissed at 6am. After 16 hours duty with half an hour's walk each way to our billet and back, left just 6 hours 45 minutes, before parade for 2pm shift, for sleep and a meal. This happened on many occasions afterwards. The mortuary keeper could not cope on his own so he had a policeman to help him. An older man who had been in the 14-18 war did this job but he had to be relieved for a day off. This was a particularly unpleasant job for you were mainly collecting parts of bodies and clothing to assemble something acceptable to be photographed for identification purposes. Each day a list of casualties whose names and addresses could be discovered was sent by teleprinter to the yard. All these messages were collated and sent to all areas so that each station could notify friends of casualties who resided in their area. (43,000 civilians were killed in the Blitz period of 7th September 1940 to the 10th May, 1941. In total the Commonwealth War Graves Commission commemorate 67,000 civilians who lost their lives as the result of enemy action between 1939 and 1945.) Another job, particularly dicey, was standing by an unexploded bomb to stop anyone going near it.

Frequently water, gas and electricity supplies would be cut off, through bombing, at the billet. A field kitchen would be set up in the yard and a tank with water for cooking. The civilian staff who worked there, many of them volunteers, were working under very difficult conditions.

Families whose homes had been rendered uninhabitable collected whatever they could salvage from the home and went to the housing office, usually with their goods on a two-wheeled coster's barrow. They seldom would accept alternative accommodation that wasn't nearby, with the result they were possibly in the same situation a week or so later, after another night of bombing.

King George VI together with Winston Churchill came to the East End to see the damage and the people. The residents complained of no opposition to the enemy aircraft and Churchill told them if they wanted ack-ack guns he would arrange it. The locals soon regretted their action. Guns were hitched to railway engines and on lorry trailers and the merchant ships all carried a naval gunner. Their instructions were if they heard aircraft in the vicinity to pump up shells. The noise was horrendous; you would hear the train brake, or the lorry stop, perhaps outside your bedroom window followed by the explosion of the gun. This blast often blew open doors and sometimes windows as well. They had got their promised guns.

There was also the problem with children and schools. Many youngsters were sent out of London right at the start of the war but as nothing much was happening many of them drifted back; schools in London had closed and had to be re-opened.

Once the blitz started many were re-evacuated with the same upheaval of schooling. Many children who remained in London later complained of spending more time transferring books and equipment from one bombed-out school to another than in the classroom themselves.

In October 1941 I joined the RAFVR. Prior to that police were not allowed to leave the force but then were permitted to volunteer for flying duties in the Fleet Air Arm or the Royal Air Force. I was called to the colours in March 1942. From the summer of 1943 I was with an operational bomber squadron (RCAF) first 419 and then 431 based at Middleton St. George in Durham and Tholthorpe and Croft in Yorkshire. I was the navigator and it was my job to direct the pilot from base to target and back to base again, making sure that the pilot flew my courses at all times. After D-Day a switch was fitted at the navigator's position controlling the bomb release mechanism. When bombing ahead of our own troops the navigator only switched this on allowing the bombs to be dropped after he calculated we were ahead of our front line. Several members of aircrew were dubious about the ethics of dropping bombs on civilians, but any who had been involved in blitzes on the major towns had no such qualms. However, whatever their ethics, everyone did their duty and were happy to think the Germans were suffering the way our people had suffered.

We had trained on Ansons and Whitleys but operated on four-engined bombers. First on Halifaxes where we endeavoured to bomb at 20,000 feet with the earlier Sterlings bombing at 14,000. Later we converted onto Lancasters with an even better height advantage getting to 30,000. The first target we had over occupied territory was just south of Paris. We were briefed to bomb on the markers with the result that it seemed safer to have navigational lights on our aircraft to avoid collision. This could only have been tactics to give the French population warning to let them get away from the target area. Fortunately no fighters seemed to be around.

Bomber Harris was never given credit for the job he did with his Command. From Dunkirk to "D" Day the only continuous attack made on the German war machine was by Bomber Command. Then on "D" Day many of the roads and railways and many guns were not available for troop movement or for defence by the Germans as a result of the bombing. There was much criticism of his attack towards the end of hostilities in Germany on the Russian Front; Dresden had road and rail junctions through which troops were travelling to the Russian Front. Attacks were made on Dresden by both Bomber Command and the USA Forces, but for some reason Harris received all the criticism. Did Churchill see the possibility of criticism from the faint-hearted and passed the buck? No medal was struck for Bomber Command although the losses of aircrew at some stages of the war was very high, with remarkably few managing to complete a first tour with a bomber squadron. When I left the Squadron in January 1945 having completed my tour, the next one with most trips was only half way through his tour, and these were all short trips to France – we were the only crew surviving who had been deep into Germany with experience of getting the aircraft out and back on a long trip.

It really riles me to hear people criticising the bombing of German civilians – they know what they say. The school teacher who got her pupils to write to the

Japanese to apologise for dropping the atom bombs should have been dealt with severely. A drastic step maybe but those bombs certainly shortened the war and saved many of our men. Bomber Command did a fine job under very difficult circumstances which was greatly assisted by the work of the scientists who were continually increasing the effectiveness of equipment – bomb sights, navigational aids, and armaments.

It is wrong for any section of the community to claim to have won the war it was the result of everyone's effort.

Best Wishes
John Geddes DFC.

Dear Nick,

I was given a copy of your article that was in the Saga Magazine by one of my RAFA colleagues.

Although I stayed on in the RAF as a regular officer and did not join civvy street at the usual demob time, I have put down my recollections of how it affected me when I did eventually leave.

To begin I must relate to my life before joining the RAF. At the age of sixteen I was a pupil surveyor working for Heatherington and Wilson whose offices were at County Chambers in Westgate Rd, Newcastle on Tyne! This firm did not take articled pupils, we were paid a small wage, two shillings and six pence to start with.

At the age of seventeen I volunteered to join the RAF to avoid conscription at eighteen, which could have meant, my being in surveying, likely to end up in the Pioneer Corps. This I did not relish. Having been a very sickly child my parents thought that I would not stand a chance of being accepted for any of the services. Much to their surprise, and mine, my application was approved. I successfully trained as a pilot in Canada and, subsequently, did a tour of operations in Bomber Command on No 101 (Special Duties) Squadron at Ludford Magna in Lincolnshire. I then trained as flying instructor, and after a further spell in Bomber Command, I was posted to Transport Command, again as an instructor.

My final qualifications were; Transport Command 'A' category 'B' VIP pilot, A2 Flying Instructor. I also held a Master Green Instrument Rating. When it came to demob' time in 1947 I had hoped to return to surveying; this would have meant a further seven years of studying. Because of my limited education and because of ill health, I had no formal qualifications, Matriculation or School Certificate, and because the firm I had been with did not have articled pupils, I was not eligible for any grant from the government. Most of the family money had been spent on my father's health; he was a very sick man with a dilated heart and severe stomach ulceration due to his service in the Royal Navy, which he joined as a boy entrant in 1905. He served throughout the First World War as a naval diver, and was awarded the DSM, as a

leading seaman, when he served on the 'Q' Ship (G & E) in 1915. (The Q Ships in World War One were decoy ships, that aimed to lure German U-Boats away from the main Royal Navy ships. They were fitted with secret guns and enticed U-Boats to the surface, before engaging in battle. In total, 44 Q Ships were lost, but they managed to destroy 15 U-Boats and were an important part of the Allied naval campaign. Rusty's Mother was awarded the Royal Red Cross Medal, after working as a matron in a military hospital during the conflict.)

I could not see myself living off my parents for many years of further education. When I was offered an extended commission I was very glad to accept it.

I married my first wife, Pat in 1948 during the Berlin Airlift time when I was in Transport Command at Oakington Cambs, serving as the flying wing training officer. I was subsequently posted to Abingdon where I was the No. 30 Squadron training officer and the unit master pilot. I had been offered a posting to the Far East as a VIP pilot but because of Pat's terminal illness I had to turn this down. In 1952 I resigned my commission to be with my wife in her remaining days, she died ten months later at the age of twenty five. The conditions of my resignation meant that I had to serve on the reserve of officers until 1961.

When I left the service I was very fortunate to be able to join Pat's father's business being mainly involved in sales, marketing and design work. This involved travelling in cardboard boxes! I do not think that I made a good sales representative; I had been brought up in a world of mutual trust and I did not fit very well into the graft, greed and to a certain extent, the dishonesty of the world of commerce.

I had, during the early days after leaving the RAF, been offered a post at Newcastle Airport, but I was warned not to take it. Pat and I bought a house at Desborough, Northants. This we did with the backing of Pat's dad. I put down my £500 gratuity and could only get a mortgage with Pat's dad standing surety.

Whilst at Desborough I applied to be a weekend flying instructor at Sywell. Our insurance company upped the insurance premium to a limit that we could not afford. I reapplied to be their glider instructor but the insurance company said that those things did not have engines and upped the premiums even more. I forgot about civvy flying.

Di had been to training college with Pat's brother's wife and it was through them that Di and I got together and married. During the courting days I still had to do a two week practice camp, renewing my flying qualifications, this I did at Marshall's Cambridge. Because of my qualifications my instructor used to say just go up and enjoy yourself. I used to take the Chipmunk and fly over to Kettering and Desborough flying around Di's school and waving to her in the playground. This I did for two years running but, because of the cutting back of funding for the RAF and the coming of jet trainers, I was told that I need to carry on attending practice camps but to remain on the reserve until such times that I might be recalled to regular service.

Being very happily married to Di and with a growing family, I soon forgot about service life although I used to go down to the Desborough Services Club every Friday night. It was not until latter years, and with advancing age, that I tended to look back and reflect on those wartimes and subsequent peacetime service years. Fate has been very kind to me. I enjoyed the service life and got great respect from all ranks,

both senior and junior, in spite of having to examine them quite harshly at times. Leaving the service was not hard because of the circumstances involved but the harsh world of business did not suit me at all. Never the less I stayed with the box making company for twenty six years until I retired at the age of sixty five.

What do I make of the UK today? I'm saddened at the way the country is being run at present. Wars still go on; are they justified? Our manufacturing industry has disappeared. I saw this starting when I first went on the road, particularly in the Coventry and Birmingham areas. What can we say about today's youth?

There are a lot of good ones, but the vandalism and disrespect of some makes me feel sad. Most of their problems, I'm sure, come from their family upbringing and the lack of parental discipline. Television has a lot to answer for; children spend too much time being entertained (?) watching television. They seem incapable of making their own pastimes. At a very young age, around six years old, I lived at number 34 Grey Street Newcastle. My grandma was the caretaker of a block of offices. We used to play in the street around the gas lamps, go to the Bigg Market, down to the Quay Side on our own, winter and summer. We later moved to Jesmond where we never locked the front door. Now we have to have special locks on our doors and we feel very uncomfortable when walking the streets at night.

Looking out of the window now there are two thirteen year old kids coming home from school kicking plastic bottles into people's front gardens. If I went out and reprimanded them I no doubt would get a mouthful of abuse and who knows what else.

I live in hope that things will 'get better' but I can't see this happening my lifetime. Bring back the good old days..... were they?

Fl Lt Russell 'Rusty' Waughman DFC.AFC (retd).

Dear Mr Pringle

RE: Shropshire Star Letter

I have just had a book published called the 'D-Day Dodger' ISBN 978-0-9550601-2-0. It deals with a time before and after my service in the Oxford and Buckingham Light Infantry. (Mr Darlington was only 17 when he was wounded at the Salerno Landings, after getting shot at by a machine gunner. After recovering from shrapnel injuries to his legs, he went back into action in Italy. On a patrol near to a tributary of the River Po, an 88mm shell exploded above his head, killing his friend behind him. His legs were badly shattered and his fingers broken, with his trigger finger needing to be sewn back on. He was in hospital for a year and an outpatient for a further three years. Out of a close 'band of brothers' that he had fought alongside, all the way up Italy, he was to be the sole survivor. The book is a great read!)

EXTRACTS

ITALY

'In these same mountains we were a small part of a much larger plan to keep the pressure on the Gustav Line and harassing tactics by small groups of the enemy was their way of slowing us down. The loss of Turner was sad because he was one of the original group, but it made us use caution and we still had this new officer to contend with. He was the reason for my baptism of fire; my wound was not that serious but the whole experience was unforgettable. We were held up by a lone German with a Spandau machine gun. He was well protected by a sangar of rocks; we couldn't get near enough to use grenades and we had nothing else for back up. As we crouched out of sight behind a ridge the officer explained his plan, "Right, we all spread out and go together on my call; before he gets over the surprise we will be on him."

This chap was not going to make staff rank but his career was not my problem, so I figured that if I had to do something this foolish then don't hang about; do it fast and furious. Wrong. My bad judgement put me ahead of the others and Ted (This was another slang term for Germans, like Gerry. It was shortened from 'Tedeschi', the Italian word for German) swung his gun round and concentrated on me. I could see him clearly and he had his mouth wide open. The only cover which lay between us were some loose boulders and I dived for one. It wasn't big enough but I had to get my head behind something. The burst of fire hit the rock before it hit my right leg. I was down but the hair brained stunt worked because Woody, who was just behind me ran forward, jumped on top of the sangar and fired down at the crouching German below his feet. He missed the man's head but the bullet went down the side of his neck. The exit wound was in his backside; the bullet must have passed through every vital organ in his body and death would have been instantaneous. I know all this because Woody came back to tell me all the gory details. My leg was a mess and we put a shell dressing on it to stop the bleeding.

The officer came over to me and was clearly pleased with himself, "You'll be alright, the stretcher bearers will be here before long." They all moved on to do their part in the bigger plan. It was a nice day; there was no rain for the first time in days so I just lay there; my leg was numb, no pain; I slipped from consciousness.

(Not long after Albert was awake by a noise and discovered behind him was a 'Ted', but to find out what happened next you'll have to buy the book!)

BACK HOME

Joe was reassuring and tried to explain what a tough time they had over the last four years, 80 hours a week, no sleep because of the bombing and fire watch on the factory roof three times a week. He made me feel like I'd had it easy. There was a lot of truth in what he said, civilians in major cities were in more danger than 50% of the forces overseas. I had to rely on Joe for the next twelve months to cover my obvious lack of experience and I shall always be in his debt, I was able to do him a favour some years later.

The factory was not my only problem, my nightmares came back. There had been very few in the last months in hospital and now shouting in the middle of the night and wetting the bed didn't help my relationship with my step-mother. It didn't

stop there. Certain noises would make me perspire and on one occasion the screaming wheels on a trolley caused me to instantly react by throwing myself to the factory floor. I tried to explain it away to the surprised people who saw me, that I had tripped up. To add to my difficulties I had no choice but to live at home, I could not afford to live anywhere else. Twice a week at the hospital I tried to explain and they put me on medication, but progress was slow.'

To talk about how I feel is difficult, to write without bias in today's celebrity culture where everything is turned into TV trivia and famous battles made into computer war games so kids can scream and shout and learn nothing about the real tragedies of war, makes me sound like a grumpy old man. I was always complaining about the boring stability of the 1930's and my eagerness to get into action in the 1940's had nothing to do with King and Country. Five years of war is a very desperate way to satisfy boredom. We leave it to the politicians to see that it doesn't happen again, but they are not doing a very good job, are they?

Has there been enough support for veterans? There was more support than my father had after the Great War, but not as much as the Americans had when they went Stateside. They were very quick to get my pension down and visits to the pension board was a soulless routine. Until the middle of 1946, it was very hard and I considered immigration and to this day I regret not going through with it. I can only imagine what I would have if I had put the same 50 years of effort into Australia. This is not sour grapes, I speak as a successful business man for 40 years, retired 18 years ago to a comfortable lifestyle. I can only sum up by saying this is a very ungrateful country.

Albert Darlington

Dear Mr Pringle

In reply to your letter in the Whitby Gazette I do have certain memories of World War Two, which may differ from the usual reports and I have very strong views on the state of Britain today.

In 1939, when I was 20, I was working as a weaver in a worsted mill in the West Riding and was, in my opinion, doing a great deal towards what was, the war effort. The management of the mill were busy fulfilling orders from the War Office in supplying cloth for service uniforms and so, for my own individual work I turned out from my two looms, around 200 yards of Khaki and Air Force Blue material per week, working from 6am to 6pm each day. However the powers that be decided that I would give a better service if I was conscripted into the Army and as I had no dependents, being single and my parents were dead, I was sent half-way across the country to be employed for the most part in marching up and down, standing for hours on parade in clumsy flat-heeled shoes and being summoned by whistles and bugles to meals and to bed, not forgetting being woken before the birds got up to parade to meals etc. etc.

I seem a bit cynical here but after my first few weeks in the forces I suffered

from one mistake after another, made by people who did not seem to know what they were doing and so, I think as far as I was concerned, for the first three years of the war we muddled through. I may also sound conceited as though things which happened to me were important but if the same mistakes were repeated through the ranks then it did matter.

As far as the state of the country today, I am sure that the members of the Atlee Government of the immediate post-war years, who really tried to make a world 'fit for heroes to live in', must be spinning in their graves from anger and frustration. The Health Service is breaking down, education is a farce, only the rich can afford a dentist or chiropodist, students are leaving university owing thousands of pounds for an education which should be free. Teenagers are causing havoc because they are treated by the education system as dunces, if they are only clever at using their hands instead of being accepted for their very useful but non-intellectual faculties. The clever and gifted children of poorer parents are deprived of the education they deserve and change is the ruling concept, whilst the need for assessment of scholars ability is ever necessary.

Whilst some politicians seem to try to bring sense to their actions they are overcome by a system which presumes that the majority of people are always right in their judgement. We are ruled mainly by dictators, clowns, money makers and liars, who are influenced by international businesses and who use the media as their self-advertising hustings.

Well I suppose that's enough for you to go on with. Forgive me for bringing out my soap-box. I'll put it away and wish you all the best.

Yours Sincerely
Edna Whelan

(Transcription from phone call)

I joined the Air Force when I was 17, as a boy entrant. I joined before the war and served for nine years and experienced quite a lot. We were the nucleus of the future Air Force at Cranwell.

I was in a bomber squadron involved in the Battle of Britain. I was on wireless watch, which brought me as close as I could be on terra firma with events that were happening in the air. There was one outstanding incident when I recall that our squadron who were flying Blenheims at the time were attacked by another Blenheim, but in point of fact was a wolf in sheep's clothing. It was flown by Germans. There were many instances of the crew literally flying themselves to exhaustion in order to do what they could to repel the German air assault.

I know for instance there was a squadron of Hurricanes on this airfield at Witham in Huntingdonshire and I was one of the wireless people who had to service their equipment. My servicing unfortunately was rendered only by a nail file which I could adjust the VHF equipment on the fighters. At this time there were things like being called out to prepare to be invaded by parachutists and I might add we just had the occasional rifle amongst several. I can remember a Blenheim, a light bomber,

coming back from operations and the pilot coming out and crying his eyes out because he hadn't been able to find his target. The tempo of events was terrific.

I was only at Witham for 3 months, then I was sent to an army corporation squadron, 613 City of Manchester Squadron. I had to report to Doncaster Racecourse, where I was told I would be under tented accommodation. Coming back from a night out at Doncaster I recall falling over cows which were scattered over the racecourse. It was followed the next day by being assembled in Doncaster Rover's football ground by General Brooke, a very important general (Alan Brooke 1883-1963 was Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and was made a Field Marshall in 1944. During the war he was Prime Minister Churchill's foremost military adviser.) What he said I cannot exactly recall, but you can bet your boots he was saying "Get back your spirits lads because we are going to fight back!" In the events which followed for me under Army Corporation Squadron, I became more and more optimistic.

OVERSEAS

I can remember such a lot about the voyage, because I had never been on a ship. It was February and first of all the ships assembled at Greenock and we went due north to put off the U-boats. Then we swung around and our first sighting was Gibraltar. I had volunteered to carry sides of meat from the cold storage place to the upper deck and this afforded me from relief from the now terrific heat, because we came firstly to the 'white mans graveyard'. Around this time it was my 21st birthday and overnight I had chosen to sleep in a hammock which was slung over men lying on the floor and of course during the heavy seas there were incidents of people being sick, so you can guess what happened!

Many times the ships in the convoy flew their flags at half mast to indicate that somebody had died. There were incidents where destroyers passed very near to our ship to take emergency actions. When we left Durban, after staying there for a few days, as we were leaving the harbour a lady standing out at the harbour exit sang songs, which are very dear to Englishmen, which gave me quite a feeling. (Perla Gibson, a local soprano in her fifties, became a familiar and much loved sight for servicemen aboard troopships. In 1940 she was at the harbour and soldiers on the deck of a ship were urging her to sing Land and Hope and Glory, so she cupped her hands and started to sing, and soon the whole ship were singing along with her. She then started returning to the harbour-side, each time a troop ship was leaving, always in a white dress and white hat, she became commonly known as 'The Lady in White'. She would sing songs through a megaphone to the troops as they sailed off to war and committed herself to doing the same for all ships that passed through Durban. In total she sang to well over 1,000 troopships and hospital ships, giving tens of thousands of troops a morale boost.) There was a general feeling of fear as we knew we were going to India. On arrival we went to a camp for transit onwards. I had been ordered to go to 36 Squadron, which was at Dubali, 60 miles north of Calcutta. The squadron had some very young men on the wireless signal section, and the ones I worked with were mainly from Manchester. The aircraft they had there were Wellingtons and were engaged on patrolling the area to make sure there was no enemy aircraft. I caught Malaria, it was

difficult to get used to the climate and conditions.

After about 6 months the squadron was suddenly told that it had to move to North Africa. This to me was an absolute miracle and I volunteered to be on the advance party and was allocated a Wellington to fly me on. We set off with all hopes, but suddenly the pilot reported that the engine was giving rockabox trouble and we had to return to base. After a short delay we flew on another better condition Wellington. We went to Karachi and had a little break, then to the Persian Gulf, then onto Cairo. On the flight over the Western Desert I saw Marble Arch, Mussolini's favourite piece of work (The arch was built when the Italians colonized that part of North Africa. It was demolished in 1970 by Muammar al-Ghaddafi's Libya revolutionary regime.) and signs of badly damaged Messerschmitts. (German military planes. The Bf 109 was the main fighter plane of the Luftwaffe.) As we approached Cairo a Hurricane fighter approached us and after wagging its wings to indicate that it understood we were not enemies we flew on and landed. The destination was Blida, just outside of Algiers.

On arrival at Blida we were allocated quarters, there was a Foreign Legion camp not far away and I can remember witnessing various activities which our boys got up to, to lift their spirits. The tented accommodation was on the edge of a vineyard. we had visits from Arabs during the night, who were adept at cutting the tent ropes and coming into the tent and taking things.

We had Wellingtons which we flew constantly on patrol over the Mediterranean with the objective of sighting and sinking submarines. Whilst in North Africa, Lancasters were doing the bombing run that took them from England over Italy then to North Africa where they landed. I do recall speaking to one of the crew of the Lancasters, who was a boy entrant like myself and who had been flying on aircrew for some time. I said many a pray for him but I don't honestly know what happened to him after he took off from Blida.

We then went on detachment to Sardinia which was of course following the 8th Army on its victorious invasion of Italy. From Sardinia we went over to Salerno, there were literally thousands of aircraft of all types that had been assembled for the battle. During this time we were privileged to see Mount Vesuvius erupting, the aircraft had the wings covered in black dust from the eruption.

We moved on to 60 miles north of Rome. It was at this point we received a new signal to be disbanded, and we were sent by rail to a transit camp outside of Naples. It was during this travel by rail that I distinctly remember seeing in the moonlight a memorable picture of Monte Cassino. Arriving at the transit camp we spent several days waiting for something to happen. To my great and everlasting relief I was posted back to England.

THE STORY OF L.A.C Lawrence Roston Reynolds - Cranwell Boy

On the 12th May, 1940, 12 Squadron who were stationed in France flying Fairey Battles received an urgent signal from the group commanding officer requesting that 12 Squadron should ask the assembled aircrews to volunteer for a suicide mission to bomb bridges at Vroenhoven, every man stepped forward to volunteer. Six crews were

chosen, time designated for take off 08:18. The flights were led by Flying Officer Garland. In the event only five took off, the sixth failed and took off later.

This resulted in the flights being attacked by swarms of ME109 fighters. A squadron of Hurricanes had been allocated to shepherd the Fairey Battles and the escort was utterly overcome by the number of enemy aircraft. When they came into view of the target, it was found to be defended by up to 300 guns of various calibre.

It can be seen that there was very few survivors amongst the crews, just the odd individual here and there. The awards for gallantry were given as follows - posthumous V.C F/O D Garland, and Observer T Gray a posthumous V.C. The Wop/G LAC LR Reynolds who was the other man in the crew got nothing. It was as if LAC LR Reynolds was not there. (Fairey Battles had a crew of three. As Wireless Operator/ Gunner aboard the lead aircraft Leading Air Craftsman LR Reynolds would have been using the radio on the way to the target. As they approached LR Reynolds would have been on the gun defending the plane from attack. All three are buried at Heverlee War Cemetery.) As a fellow boy entrant I have made every effort to have this matter brought into the light of public opinion. I wrote to the secretary general of the Royal Air Force Association and the appointed minister of defence, but was met with no encouragement. Common sense will prevail with bringing this shameful event to a successful award of a V.C for L.A.C LR Reynolds.

I firmly believe that this country has been let down by people who expressing the wonderful thoughts of 'Let people come in, let them join us' has been to the total detriment of the people, the natives of this England, being over saturated as we were in Bradford by people who were not only of a foreign race but a foreign religion. I must say we are now very very sad and disappointed about the country. I feel proud of my generation and we went through a lot.

A Cranwell Boy Entrant

Dear Mr Pringle

I noticed your 'CAN YOU HELP' entry in the Saga Magazine. I served in the Army throughout World War II from the age of 19. I was posted to France in October, 1939, returned via Dunkirk then onto North Africa, Italy and Austria.

DUNKIRK

I joined the Territorial Army in April 1939 and was mobilised along with reservists on September 1st, when Germany invaded Poland and war was declared two days later on the third.

We were sent to join the B.E.F in France six weeks later, even though we were only partly equipped and not fully trained. Our training consisted of two evenings a week and two weeks in summer camp at Swingate Camp, Dover, and that training was based on 1st World War action. My unit was the 223 Field Park Company, Royal

Engineers and we spent our time digging trenches, rivetting them and building parapets with sandbags. Handling mines and explosives and building bridges is also part of the RE's work, but we did none of that apart from learning about explosives.

In France we were stationed at Orchies, close to the Belgium frontier, consisting of concrete pill boxes, anti-tank traps and dragons teeth concrete posts to impede tanks. We were assisted by units of the Pioneer Corps. It was a period known as the 'Phoney War' because there was no land fighting apart from patrol activity. Only the Navy and Air Force were in action against Germany.

We made ourselves comfortable in empty houses and, apart from Army discipline, it was like working abroad. We had trips to Douai and Lille, saw concert parties and frequented the estaminets for wine and egg and chips. We were still not fully equipped and our lorries had no anti-freeze so the radiators had to be drained every night. There were several false alarms when the German troops were reported massing on the frontiers, but they came to nothing, until we were called from our beds on the 10th of May when Germany invaded Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. Initially we attempted to complete the defence line, but the B.E.F moved forward into Belgium to meet the advancing Germans and the defence line was never manned. It would not have changed anything as things worked out, because the German advance into France was further south and headed for the coast. The BEF was then surrounded.

For the next three weeks we were constantly on the move and the one thing that sticks in my mind was the lack of information. We were never told where we were going, what we were going to do when we got there, how the battle was developing, what our objectives were or the fact that we were surrounded. I don't know whether our officer's knew and I suspect that they were in the dark as much as us or they would have told us. Perhaps it was a good thing we didn't know because, as the saying goes ; 'When ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise'.

The chaos was widespread. The roads were crammed not only with French and British troops on the move, but refugees fleeing ahead of the advancing Germans including Belgians, who recalled occupation under the Germans in the 1st World War. The roads were bombed and machine gunned constantly and there was no discrimination between troops and civilians. French troops had a lot of horse drawn transport and the refugees also used horses to pull carts. Dead animals on the roads and in the fields lay around with the sickly smell of decaying flesh. These poor people, old men, women and children, suffered horribly and were soon short of food. It was ironic that they would have been better off to have stayed at home because, like the troops, they were also surrounded.

One evening we arrived at Cassel, which stood at the foot of a hill. We left our transport and climbed the hill to dig in on the forward slope in anticipation of a German attack. During the evening a Sergeant came round with a jar of rum and we got our mugs for a rum ration. As he doled out the rum he took a swig from a jar and when he got to me he was well away! I took a drink and it burned my throat, it was so strong. However, it warmed us up and the Germans didn't come, so we were never to find out whether army rum makes you more aggressive. Come morning we moved on.

Lack of information continued and naturally with it, rumours, but I don't recall

it ever being mentioned that the B.E.F was surrounded or of plans to evacuate back to England. Then one day I noticed army vehicles being driven off the roads and abandoned, some even being set on fire. Ahead I could see German dive bombers attacking a target and then we were ordered to abandon our vehicles and proceed on foot with what equipment we could carry. Shortly, we arrived at some sand dunes and climbing to the top I was amazed at the sight. In front of me was the sea and on the beaches, thousands of troops. The dive bombing I had seen was directed at ships at anchor offshore and rowing boats were plying to and fro, transporting troops to the ships. You had to wade out to get in a boat, but as there were not enough boats, when the boat was full the men in the water returned to the beach to await another boat.

This went on until nightfall when, wet and cold, we lay on the beach until next morning when the evacuation continued. We had nothing to eat except our emergency ration and water in our water bottles. All through the day I waded out unsuccessfully. By now only one man of my company was with me, a man called Hill, who we called Bunny. He said to me "George, can you swim?" It was difficult to judge the distance to the ships and we decided not to try it. That night and next morning, same again. Then a company of the Leicester Regiment came on the beach and their officers cordoned off a section of the beach so that when the boats came in, at least one or two were inside their cordon. So I joined them. Bunny had disappeared by then, and I finally got into a boat and off the beach.

Reaching the ship, I climbed aboard and was sent down below. After a while I felt the ship move. I still didn't know we were bound for England and expected to be shipped along the coast and back into France. Then there was a huge explosion and the next thing I knew, was that I was back on shore again, probably Dunkirk harbour. My recollections of these events are very vague, but I remember being on a jetty and some small motor launches were taking off troops. I was lucky to be near one and jumped aboard. The boat only took about a dozen men, we went below and the boat set off. We were on that boat for hours, the sea was choppy and I was sick, an unpleasant experience on an empty stomach. Eventually the boat stopped and we came up on deck. It was a place I seemed to recognise, standing at tables on the harbour wall were women handing out tea to the troops. I said to one, "Where are we?" She said "Ramsgate". I remembered then that two years ago I had spent a holiday there. It explained why the trip had taken so long.

We were bussed to the station, put on board a train and locked in. The train went to London, stopped at Clapham Junction then on again. We passed through Chelsea station by Chelsea Football Club. I lived only 20 minutes walk away in Fulham, but we were locked in. I don't think I would have jumped train and gone home anyway, I wasn't in a fit state to see my family.

We went on and finally stopped at Shrewsbury, near the Welsh border and were bussed to the barracks of the Shropshire Light Infantry where the troops gave up their bunks for us to have a good night's sleep, the first for many days. We were able to write to our families to say we were home and then sent off to other parts of the country to re-join our units. I found mine at Ripon, from there we went South London, where we took part in preparing for the German invasion. There were air raids every day and

later night bombing. But Hitler missed an opportunity to knock Britain out of the war, because although some 350,000 men escaped from Dunkirk we had left all our equipment behind. (At the Dunkirk Town CWGC Cemetery, there are 793 Second World War burials and on a memorial, the names of over 4,500 members of the British Expeditionary Force of 1940 with no known grave. The "Dunkirk Spirit", of the B.E.F and the fleet of little ships, inspired the nation and to this day the phrase is used to describe people keeping a 'stiff upper lip' and battling through adversity and crisis, no matter what the odds.)

ITALY

'F Recce' was a group of Italian paratroopers from the Folgore division of airborne troops. They called themselves 'Folgore da cielo'. During the winter of 1944 they held positions in the mountains north of Florence at Casola Valsenio on the 6th Armoured Division front, where the weather and terrain had halted the advance.

They decided to lay a line of flares with trip wires across a known German patrol route, a task they could handle themselves with one exception. When mines or flares were laid it was required that a chart, showing the location with map references and compass bearings, had to be lodged at division HQ to warn other troops of the existence of a minefield. My unit, the 8th Field Squadron RE, was asked to provide a man to accompany them to draw up a chart and because I could speak Italian I was elected to go.

It was a night operation because the area was under observation but we had some help from 'artificial moonlight' created by searchlights shining up to the clouds which reflected the light back to earth.

We started work, when British sappers laid mines and flares with trip wires, to avoid accidents, we left the safety pins in until all had been laid and the chart completed then one man went along the line withdrawing the pins. However, the Italians were taking the pins out as they went along and suddenly a flare went off. In the dark one of the Italians had fouled a trip wire and the whole party was exposed in a small area as bright as day. We were all wearing snow suits, a kind of oversized pyjamas in white cloth which we wore over our uniforms to merge us with the snowy background, but any enemy patrol in the vicinity could hardly have missed us.

Every man froze, it was like a tableau, not a movement and not a sound apart from the burning flares which seemed to go on for ever. Our luck was in, enemy patrols had taken a night off.

Eventually the flare burnt out, the flare was replaced, I finished the chart and the job was done. Back to 'F Recce' forward command post, a few glasses of their brandy, some ribbing of the guilty man and back to my unit with the chart. All part of a day's - or night's work!

Demobbed in 1946 after six years of the experiences of a lifetime, I found civilian life dull. After overseas travel, fear, excitement, good times and bad, hardship and comradeship and finally victory over an evil regime, going back to my pre-war job seemed uninviting.

I went to Germany working for the Control Commission for Germany, an

organisation set up to restore Germany to self government. After two year's the job came to an end and I went to Italy to visit an Italian girl I had known during the war. We decided to get married and were married in England in January 1947. This changed my life and I settled down to civilian life which lasted for 52 happy years. My wife was wonderful, we had a son and a daughter and four grand-children. Sadly, my wife died five years ago. I miss her terribly but I still go to Italy to visit her family. It was marriage and a wonderful wife that finally gave me a future after the war. Now, at 87, I live alone with my memories and feel grateful for the way my destiny turned out.

My opinion of the country today is that we have the worst Prime Minister in living memory and the worst government. I also believe that the European Union is an undemocratic, over-centralised, bureaucracy of sinecures and that Britain should be a trading partner and no more. We were deceived into thinking it was a Common Market, when in fact it is a political union.

Yours Sincerely
George Hillman

To Nick Pringle

Life in the UK nowadays is ever so dull and the people are not and haven't got the same rhythm, understanding and personality as in the war years. No such a thing nowadays of down to earth people; theres my hand, theres my heart.

I joined up 8/6/1938, (RAF Regiment) I got 2 bob a day, to my mother 7 bob a week, I got 6 bob one week, 8 bob next week and was far happier in those days than now, not the money nowadays. There is no friendliness at all in the UK population. A stranger in London, Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds remains a stranger.

The Marimonte Convent Rome still keep in contact with me, (Towards the end of the war Mr Jones was stationed at 149 Staging Post, Ciampino Airport, Rome. He was accommodated in a Villa next to an Irish Convent. As a Belfast Protestant he met Father Leahy, a Catholic from County Cork who had not been home to Ireland for 26 years. After being invited into the Convent he realised that many of the Irish nuns had not heard from home for years. He gave out his Air Force Letters with his name on, and they all wrote home. The letters were sent via the Forces Postal Service and Mr Jones received the replies from back in Ireland. He explained that he will never forget the joy as he handed the replies to those for who they were intended. He continued to do this for many months until he as posted elsewhere and visited the convent everyday and Father Leahy would visit the Sergeants mess at the villa. The nuns even managed to contact relatives living in the U.S.A. As a thanks the nuns organised friends back home to provide a thank you. Mr Jones wife was asked to go to the Grand Central Hotel in Belfast, where waiting for her was a godsend of a parcel during rationing of tea, butter, eggs and meat.) as I do with my old comrades that are left. Best respects and regards for a job well done, you are doing.

Sincerely
Johnny Jones

I came out of the RAF 1946 and I rejoined 1951, came out 1966 and into General Post Office, atmosphere and workers all great.

Dear Nick Pringle

In response to your letter in the Bristol Evening Post, and other papers. I served in the Royal Army Service Corps (now Logistics Corp) from 1942-47, and, apart from early training in this country, spent nearly all my time overseas on active service in North Africa, Sicily, Italy (two landings), Palestine, Egypt, returning home late 1947.

I am now married with two grown up sons, and five grandchildren, retired and fortunately still enjoying reasonable health and mobility. I am not happy about many of the current trends in modern society; binge drinking, use of drugs etc. but I have to acknowledge that there are many aspects that should have improved general living conditions for the majority of people in both health and mobility. Everyone now seems to have a car etc, but I would like to think that people appreciate these advances, without being too selfish in their own lives. There seems to be many aspects of life that has changed over recent years, and the conflicts in Iraq etc. have not helped to provide a unity of purpose that was so strong during the WWII years.

Yours
Gordon Bryant

Dear Sir

In answer to your ad in the Gwent Gazette. I joined the army in Chester, 1943 at Blacken Camp or 9PTC. I then went to Alfreton Derbyshire to join R.A.S.C. After the war I took up duties as a driver battman and went to Palestine & Egypt. I was discharged in 1947. I was offered 3 jobs before leaving the army by officers families but rejected them all after meeting my wife. With not many jobs on offer, I settled for bus driving for a local bus company. After 12 months and no prospects and no overtime, I only kept the job for the family. I moved onto the Red & White Bus Company, a big firm- better money and prospects, there was overtime but none of the best private hire, that was for top union reps and golden oldies.

I had health problems and a fatal accident so I moved on to ambulance driving, I found I had landed into a nest of Uncle Nebbies boys who took all the overtime and and no questions asked. If I done it, it was questioned all because one day I spoke out against Harold Wilson P.M, because his wife Mary had sacked all the kitchen staff. I was injured with a serious neck injury and with no light duties coming forward I was forced to finish because 5 out of every 6 drivers taken on before I started were disabled from other jobs or war disabled, but recommended for jobs through councillors. After

being ill for 12 months and 3 children I got a light job as a watchman with British Steel. I took early retirement in 1981.

I tried for my war pension and won and backdated, because I should not have been taken into the Army in the first place, after receiving a complicated fracture of my femur in 1940. I am 81 and after 58 years lost my wife on 17th of April, 2004.

Yours Faithfully,
Norman Poole

Dear Mr Pringle

In reply to N Pringle enquiring in Tuesdays edition of Manchester Evening News, yes I was an air raid warden for most of the time, living in Manchester. When I was an ARP warden I worked in two departments, first in the Land Army based in Hereford for a fortnight of potato lifting, and later as a relief air raid warden in London. Wardens were having to cope with the incessant London air raids which were taking place at the time.

As to my opinion of the country today, the least I say the better. That comment does not include the general public, especially here in Manchester and Stockport, where I have experienced nothing but helpfulness, particularly recently while recovering from an operation restricting my mobility. During the war years England was a country to be proud of as everyone appeared to be glad of any opportunity to do their bit. Having lived through two world wars the thought of another conflict is truly horrifying. The ghastly episode of the ill treatment of Prisoners of War (if true) is extremely worrying.

Miss F Evelyn

Dear Sir

I am now 91 years of age and have nearly finished writing my life story, comprising of my early life in London and Aldershot, moving up to Hawick in the Scottish Borders, my call up to the 4th K.O.S.B (Kings Own Scottish Borderers) training camp in Berwick Upon Tweed in August 1940. My transfer to the R.A.S.C in 1941, moving about in Yorkshire for sometime then posted to Gilston Camp, on the Bristol Channel, later posted up to Paisley near Glasgow sailing from Gourock on the Clyde to the Middle East in August 1942. Moving to El Alamein after Montgomery had defeated the Germans in October, then moving up the desert with spells in Buq Buq, Benghazi, Tobruk and Cairo, sent back to England and demobbed in 1946, back to Civvy St. Couldn't settle down, moved around various labouring jobs in Hawick and Coldstream, finishing up in my present abode, after my marriage to a wonderful lady.

This is a brief summary of my life, another 30 or so pages will see me finish my life story. Here is how my story begins....

Yours Faithfully
W.G Osborne

A young German at the controls of the Zeppelin flying blind in the night sky over London unloading his deadly cargo creating death and destruction on the innocent's down below. He hoped the searchlights probing the darkness would not capture his airship in their deadly glare, because he knew if they did, his slow moving Zeppelin had little chance of shaking them off, which meant the guns would have the airship pin-pointed in their sights. The ceaseless barrage would most certainly blast the Zeppelin out of the sky.

A young widow and her two infant sons, felt lonely and afraid in her small upstairs room. Hearing the drone of the machine coming closer she lit a candle to see if the children were alright. "Put out that light!" the shout coming from the air raid warden patrolling the street down below made her jump with fright. The Zeppelin, louder now, was very close. It suddenly turned and made off in a different direction. The young widow, hearing the sound fading away in the distance, said a prayer and thanked God for his help. There would be more raids to come in the dark nights ahead, she had to be brave for her two young sons. The German aviator, having dropped his last bomb, was heading for home. He was clear of the searchlights and felt a lot safer flying over the channel, making for base.

The fear and tension he always felt when on these raids had subsided. He knew there would be more raids bringing more fear, more tension, praying the war would soon be over for himself and everyone caught up in this body and soul destroying misery called war.

The young widow was our mother. I was the youngest of her two sons, age about 6 months, brother Jimmy about 18 months. We were too young to remember the heart ache our mother would be suffering at this time in London. A few days before the air raid she received word informing her husband (our father) had been killed on the 26th September 1915 at the Battle of Loos and buried in an unknown grave. He was a private in the East Kent Regiment, (The Buffs). She was one of the thousands of young widows who lost their husbands in the same tragic way, many with young families to care for. What a terrible pain, fear and unhappiness they all must have suffered. Our mother told my brother and I about these unhappy times when we were old enough to understand.

Our mother met her second husband who was a sergeant in the 5th Dragoon Guards. They were in Aldershot when they married, when war was over we settled in the Scottish Borders. They had three children; Violet, George and Theresa. Jimmy and I were treated by our step-father just like his own children. He was a good man and we all got on well together. He was born and bred in Edinburgh.

Dear Mr Pringle

I am now 85. I joined the ATS, as it was in 1940, and trained as a radar operator to work on gun sites. At the end of the war, radar was no longer needed. I was sent to a C.R.U (Civil Repatriation Unit) for returned P.O.W's. An ex P.O.W from Colditz walked into the office where I was working. I took one look at him, and decided that was the one I was going to marry, after all the hundreds I had met!

We had 55 years - wonderful, wonderful years together, so I had no problems settling into civilian life. While in Colditz - where he was the camp Dentist, he had always dreamt of growing his own food and keeping a Jersey cow. That is what we did, (plus 3 children), although he always worked full time as a Mascullo-Facial Surgeon. (Eric Cooper was born in 1912 in Yorkshire and studied Dentistry at Guys Hospital, London in 1931 and at the outbreak of war joined the army. He was captured at the Battle of Crete in 1941 and was prison dental officer at Colditz until the end of the war. On the first day of the NHS being founded he took up an appointment at the Manchester Regional Hospital Board and had a long and distinguished career as a Consultant Dental Surgeon covering hospitals across the North West of England.)

What do I make of the world today - not a lot. Wars, wars - we never learn. My grandsons best friend was killed while serving together in Iraq. At least my generation knew what we were fighting for - our freedom. Many of the younger generation seem so bored (not all). All my 8 grandchildren have university degrees. Many have too much money and spend a lot on drink. I earned 10/- a week in the army at the beginning and sent 7/6 to my mother. Happy days - but I miss my wonderful husband so much and live alone.

Yours Faithfully
JE Cooper

Dear Sir

Yes, I served in the last war, 5 years 1940-45. A sergeant in the RAF- 2 years in England, 3 years in India, Iraq, North Africa, Italy 8th Army and 5th Army. Since the war the country has gone to the dogs. We are short of prisons, hospitals, schools and houses and yet we still allow immigrants into this country. Many other countries pay their ex servicemen a pension. Even the Germans who lost the war - we get nothing. I just about manage on my state pension.

Yours Truly
Jacky Grantham

Dear N Pringle

Ref; your request for opinions on the present situation in the country today. Do you refer to the daily reports of the millions being made by the rich or the £3 rise in

pensions for the elderly? I believe that I, and millions of servicemen and women who served this country during the Second World War, have been badly neglected.

My own contribution started at the age of 18 in 1942, after training I joined the 2nd Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. December 1943 sailed to North Africa, marched through Tunis into Algeria. Awoke one morning as a stretcher bearer acted as a runner, as the company took on a battalion of Germans who surrendered without a fight. Shortly afterwards we were fired up at midnight, it was the Friday before Easter. We suffered a number of wounded and casualties. Ambie Hewit, one of our stretcher bearers, had his leg shattered, when a large number of Stuka dive bombers attacked. A few days later I was posted to Longstop Hill, their shells pounded constantly. I still see casualties. Two privates looked up to see what damage had been done, when a shell fell. Another shell exploded in the same place, it blew their faces away. They stood up. I tried to lay them down. I still see them now.

Feb 1944 - we were among the first troops to land on Anzio. The first casualty was Jimmy Marsh, a friend, blew up by a land mine on the beach. A number of our battalion were killed and wounded during the night of the 8th February. I commandeered a truck and escorted the wounded to the American Hospital. It was on the main road. An officer said he could not let me return to the front, but I knew it was my duty. Major Merriment had been wounded, the corporal stretcher bearer cared for him. (Recently the Major's son visited us.) At dawn we were surrounded by the enemy. A young soldier asked if I could take him to get two stretchers. He was polite and let me take my top coat, a large tin of tobacco given to me by friends on the troopship and other useful articles.

After a few days in the attic of a farmhouse we were driven in the back of lorries to the Cinecittà Film Studios in Rome then to another camp, on the way strafed by English fighter planes, German escort ran and sheltered in ditches. From the camp at Latrina we boarded a train, crowded into a cattle truck and spent 5 days and nights, did stop for a coffee in Austria. Landed later at Stalag IVB. Time spent in prison camp spent mostly writing and drawing. Roll calls morning and nights were punishing, especially winter.

During the final months of May 1945 listened to distant Russian artillery. April 21st army arrived at the gates, for a few days allowed out of gates, fences were broken down. Two of us found the German store and used an old pram and confiscated a large barrel of Molasses, walked to nearby village, invited by Russian soldiers to lunch in a large house, bowls of soup were placed on long tables. Everyone dipped their hands in and grabbed the meat. After returning to camp, orders were given no-one could leave camp.

At the end of April decided to, with a small group of prisoners, make an escape due mostly to the scarcity of Russian food. On April 27th just myself and Sgt George Pedley (a prisoner for 5 years) decided to make a break for it. We broke out of the camp at midnight and made for the woods. On the 1st May, we were again captured by the Russians and mixed with dozens of German soldiers and civilian women and children. The soldiers and some of the men were escorted away into the woods, we could hear shouting and rifle shots. We were shouting "We are British!" A Russian officer came out

of his tent. He shouted "Who shouted they're British?" We walked to him, we were escorted into the tent.

Next will be difficult to believe. "Where do you come from?" he asked. George replied "Warwick", "and you Private?", "Leamington Spa Sir." "And what colour bus travels from Leamington to Stratford?" "Blue" George said. After loads of questions, George said "How do you know so much about Warwickshire?" He replied that he had been educated at Oxford spending his spare time taking the train to Leamington and travelling the Midlands before telling us that the Americans were crossing the River Elbe later that day (1st May). He gave me a large box of cigarettes. As George didn't smoke he gave him a large box of chocolates, then gave us a sergeant to escort us to the River Elbe.

The Americans came ashore, we asked if they would give us a lift back. We were told in no way, if we didn't clear off we would be shot. Later a ferry man, who had heard them, indicated with his watch he would return at midnight and ferry us over. He came as promised and gave us a meal and a bed and pointed directions in the morning to Dresden. On May the 1st we had spent the night on pebbles under the bridge on the edge of town, at dawn we heard the rumble of tanks. They were American. We were allowed to travel holding onto the turret. At the camp we had the most wonderful meal, but then spent days then weeks getting to Le Havre on the coast. It was the middle of June before arriving home. Apart from an invite at the local town hall no one has mentioned my service. My discharge notice stated - Satisfactory. I did serve a few months in the Military Police on return.

Thank You
An ex Lance Corporal

Dear Nick

My service in the W.R.N.S (Women's Royal Naval Service) was my life's greatest experience, making me what I am today. As an officers steward, (Pat's aunty burnt her call up papers as the family were opposed to the idea of her going into the Royal Navy. However, she arrived for training at HMS Eaglet in Liverpool and was posted to HMS Osprey at Dunoon) I met men of every nationality fighting against Germany, Lord Louis Mountbatten, Prince Philip, serving dinner/drinks, film celebrities of the era. I experienced returning from battle, scarred at times, mentally disorientated. From our elevated position overlooking the Clyde, we would watch submarines take off, which did not weeks later return.

In the spring of 1946, General De Gaulle came to Greenock for the unveiling ceremony of the Cross of Lorraine, the signia of the Free French, a high concrete statue overlooking the Clyde. I was the marker in the parade, certainly a day to remember.

You ask for my views of the country as it is today. I think most veterans would agree with the following sentiments in the late 40's, into the 50's and 60's, women could not obtain a mortgage in their own right, or sign a hire purchase agreement, men could

borrow up to one third their wages/salary, women doing the same work as men were paid far less.

In the 50's, early 60's, children would lark about in the street, spend hours in the park, go on bus journeys with friends, stay overnight in each others home, knock on your door asking "Do you need anything from such and such a shop?"

They don't lark about these days. They're young thugs, terrorising the weak and elderly. Young mothers - most of whom seem hardly old enough to be out of school- use their prams as battering rams. People are all too aware of their rights and reluctant to accept responsibility. Corruption and deceit are spreading down from the top in politics and industry. Our towns are not protected by patrolling policemen, but by cameras, which merely records the violence rather than prevent it.

A constantly prying government has even turned road safety into a money making venture. Everyone in public service is there solely for the money. They want and take authority, but they don't want responsibility either. They want to take our hospitals, our roads, our schools, our churches and libraries. Post offices and police stations are shutting, leaving people to telephone help lines 100's and 1,000's of miles away. Every year we pay more taxes and get considerably less in services. Nothing is as good as it was - and costs more. Selfishness takes priority, our freedom and privacy are disappearing fast - all in the name of security, in which people are encouraged to be selfish, to think only of themselves. There is no community any more. What a pity, the agony of the age does not penetrate our minds in youth, facing us with the truth.

Those with a grasp of history fail to see why experts pronounced that we were happier in the 1930's - a period associated with the 'depression', the rise of Nazism, and poor living standards. What they forget is that Britain then had the basic requirements of a happy society. Rules and decent values. There was a clear line between right and wrong, upheld not just by the rule of law, but by schools, the church and strong families. The failed experiment of the past 40 years or so has washed such notions away.

I'm off to bed. Goodnight, God Bless, Good Luck
With my very tired best wishes
Pat

Dear Mr Pringle

I was sitting on the West Cliffs at Hastings minutes after hearing the Prime Minister telling us we were at war with Germany. I was certain I would be watching those fleets of bombers crossing the Channel to bomb us on the first day. Despite the air raid sirens sounding it was a disappointing anti climax when nothing happened.

After the British and French armies were overcome, came the miracle of Dunkirk. My father and I went to the Empress Stadium, which was close to the Earls Court Exhibition. There we watched the returning troops, largely dishevelled, with parts of their uniforms missing, lay down what arms they had brought back before being taken into the Empress Stadium to be billeted. It was at this time that everyone

started talking about Britain being on its own. Morale was surprisingly high. Everyone knew that there was the Royal Navy between us and a German land invasion.

Then the Germans switched their attack to London. On one occasion I was at home in the late afternoon with my mother in Fulham when a lone bomber came over and machine gunned the houses. My mother and I hid under the table until the danger passed. In our road we had three unexploded bombs at different times and the Fulham baths which backed into our road was hit by a high explosive bomb. One of my school friends was killed when a bomb destroyed a shelter some 150 yards from my our house.

Each night the sirens would sound and we would go into the cellar. We would often greet the morning having had little sleep, with no gas to cook with and sometimes no lighting. However, and this is a point little made by historians, we still had to go to work six days a week, sometimes finding it difficult to get there with debris in the streets and bus and train services disrupted.

My father who had fought in France for the whole of the four years of the Great War 1914-18, and who was wounded three times, volunteered for the Auxiliary Fire Service. He was based in Chelsea and he was out often during the raids putting out fires and rescuing people from bombed out buildings. He was involved in the rescue of survivors of the bombing of Sloane Square tube station where many people were killed, and he still had to go to work the next day. He was a real hero but received not one medal.

In my job at the Electricity Supply Company, it now fell to me along with qualified staff to go into bombed buildings to cut off electricity to make them safe. This entailed climbing across beams and debris where floors were missing and not knowing if there were any unexploded bombs left in the premises. I was still only sixteen.

Towards the worst of the bombing a land mine on a parachute drifted along the length of our road and exploded two or three streets beyond. This mine destroyed hundreds of houses. The next morning I walked through the rubble of the devastation. Some houses had frontages standing minus windows and doors and the back of houses totally gone. There were many complete streets totally destroyed over a vast area. The really heavy bombs did not whistle but would sound just like an express train going through a station.

In 1942 when I became 18 I volunteered for the RAF. I passed the education exam to go into aircrew but I was failed medically owing to astigmatism in my left eye. This meant I had to go into ground crew and since I was in the electrical industry I was accepted for training as an aircraft electrician. I then passed a leading aircraftsman trade test and served as an LAC for a couple of years. I was posted to 58 Squadron, which was based at Number 1 Station Coastal Command at St Eval in Cornwall.

On arriving at St Eval I soon learned about wartime flying. On my first full day two Beaufighter aircraft screamed low across the airfield. The following aircraft was caught in the slip-stream of the first and nose dived into the ground, destroying the aircraft and killing the crewmen. 58 Squadron were flying Halifax bombers converted for long distance coastal command duties. At this time of the war Britain was being starved by the German U-boats destroying merchant ships bound for UK ports bringing food, oil, and other essential products. Winston Churchill called the Battle of the

Atlantic the most important battle of the war. Our aircraft went out over the Bay of Biscay hunting U-boats and often did not come back, being shot down by JU88 fighter bombers of the Luftwaffe deployed to protect the U-boat fleet. 58 Squadron, which had been diverted from Bomber Command to reinforce Coastal Command, lost many aircraft whilst I served with it.

My job was to make daily inspections of all the electrical equipment on the aircraft, to service and repair equipment as required and to make inter flight inspections. The nearest town was Newquay. The beach was off limits as it was mined and covered with barbed wire. The town was nine miles from the airfield and there was no official transport. Sometimes you could get a lift in a service vehicle but mostly we walked. St Eval was strafed and bombed from time to time and many airmen and airwomen were killed and wounded.

I remember well the eerie atmosphere in the crew rooms which were lit at a very low level, waiting to get the word to go out to the dispersals with the aircrews in the crew wagons. Then was the anxious wait for them to return and counting them back in... if they all came back.

A typical event happened to an aircraft of 58 Squadron. This aircraft was manned by a complete crew of sergeants. They were a lively crew, full of fun. The aircraft went on operations over the Bay of Biscay and was jumped by JU88s and shot down. However, the crew managed to escape from the destroyed aircraft into a dinghy. They were spotted by another aircraft from our squadron and the position noted. The spotting aircraft returned to base and loaded a boat slung under the aircraft which would enable the crew to survive longer than in the dinghy, hopefully until a navy ship could be despatched to effect a rescue.

Unfortunately the weather closed in and by the time the aircraft was ready it was pouring with rain and visibility was very poor. The officer piloting the aircraft was still anxious to go but then on inspection it was found the pilot head heater was unsafe. This meant the air entering the instruments could not be heated and hence the pilot would have no airspeed indication. Still the pilot insisted he would go but the wing commander in charge of the squadron ruled out the flight because it was much too dangerous with no airspeed indication. The sergeants were lost to the sea. The decision not to go was devastating but inevitable.

There was an OTU (Officer's Training Unit) on the station and they were used on operations. They unfortunately were flying the old Whitleys and several at various times came back from operations crippled and crashed on landing. As the war progressed we started to get crippled American bombers landing at St Eval, very shot up with dead and wounded crew aboard. We also had two US squadrons, one Navy, one Army, permanently stationed with us. They were Flying Fortresses looking for U-boats and although they always flew with all guns manned restricting their range, I always had the greatest respect for them. Their ground crews were in billets next to ours and we used to sit on the grass with them in the evening after duty, and although they were better fed and paid than we were I never felt envious and always got on remarkably well with them.

Then a quick posting. We took off in transport aircraft - arrived in Suez.

Montgomery was by now chasing Rommel out of Libya and we were used to collect crashed aircraft on low loaders and transport them back to the maintenance units in the Canal zone. Our stay in the desert was brief and much to my dismay I was posted back to the UK again.

I was relieved when later on I was put on an overseas posting. After two weeks of rumour as to where we were going we were entrained one night and we travelled all night to Gourock on the Clyde. I remember as the train passed through Crewe Station all the lady porters called out, 'Give them one for us, boys!'. As everyone knows, the spirit of the people in Britain was wonderful, never to be quite the same after the war.

We were transferred by Pinnacle to our troopship, the Monarch of Bermuda, and allocated bunks. Our draft was lucky; we were put into the ballroom, which was on an upper deck. The room was filled from floor to ceiling with wooden bunks. There must have been a couple of hundred of us in there but thanking our stars we were not down below as most were. There were 5,000 troops, airmen and sailors on the ship. In a few days we sailed, joining a large convoy including a small aircraft carrier converted from a merchant ship, many destroyers, and frigates. The weather was poor and the seas were high, causing many on board to be very seasick. I was one of the few lucky ones and was unaffected.

As our ship went through the Mediterranean there was a lot of U-boat activity. The next ship to us was the Cape Town Castle, also being used as a troopship. We saw the destroyers racing between us, dropping depth charges with great plumes of water cascading in the air. When this occurred the ship was called to action stations. On one occasion we were down in the holds shifting potatoes and we could hear the booms of the depth charges resonating on the hull of the ship. Action stations were sounded and we were required to muster on deck with our lifebelts on in our action station allotted positions. In charge of us was a merchant seaman who had survived being torpedoed twice. He ordered us to carry on, saying he would tell us when we needed to go to action stations. He was subsequently brought up before the ship's captain and fined ten shillings, which was quite a sum in those days. We also had a few scares from air attacks. A flight of German aircraft flew down to the length of the convoy with all guns blazing at them, but as far as we could see nothing was hit and no bombs were dropped.

We eventually arrived in the Suez Canal. What an experience for a boy who had rarely been outside of London! We jeered the Arabs who replied by lifting their smocks and showing us their genitals! Arriving in the Red Sea and down to Aden it was so hot. One unfortunate who apparently was unable to sweat died in the ship's sick bay. We sailed on through the Indian Ocean down to Durban. Here we were met by the famous 'Lady in White' who traditionally sang opera to all the arriving troopships.

During this time the war in Europe had ended. We were advised that we were to be part of the force to go to carry the fight to Japan. Before that could happen the atomic bomb exploded on Hiroshima and the Japanese war ended. I found Civvy Street very dull. I missed my pals and the experience of everyone pulling together and being so close to one another was terribly missed. I never experienced that sort of

comradeship ever again, and it took me two years to come to terms with civilian life.

RAF TERMS

Wizard - Cool

Gen - Genuine

Pukka - Fairly certain

The Golden Eagle shits today - said on pay day

Kites - Aircraft

ROTB - Roll on the boat (Often wrote on the side of trains, walls, hoardings etc overseas meaning 'bring on the day when the boat comes to take me home')

Yours Sincerely

Bill Merritt

Dear Mr Pringle

My name is Edward John Frost, but everyone calls me John. I was born in Paddington, London in 1920, from a working class family. At the age of 10 we moved to Ealing, which I have always considered my home. In 1934 at the age of 14, I left private school (church) with no qualifications. However, I was different from my four brothers and two sisters, inasmuch I was a great book reader, interested in general knowledge and history. As a schoolboy my hobby was collecting newspapers, which reprinted historic events (more of that later!)

Again in 1934 I became an office boy for Unilever Ltd, at their huge office building in Blackfriars, City of London. I wore a suit with waistcoat, a briefcase (usually full of sandwiches), in rainy weather a rolled up umbrella to make myself look important. I read the Daily Telegraph - price one Penny. I travelled on the Underground from Park Royal to Blackfriars every morning at 8am and left the office at 5.30pm. By 18 I was a Clerk in the Unilever Savings Bank, same old routine day in, day out.

The late 1930's were making headlines about Hitler and Mussolini. Abyssinia and Albania invaded, the Rhineland occupied by German troops and one name dominated - Danzig. Unilever encouraged its employees to join the Territorial Army, which I did in early 1939. Come September 1st 1939 and I was called out as a Fusilier with a Searchlight Unit. I was 19, never left home before, a bit of a 'mother's boy' and posted to a lonely searchlight site in Norfolk. From city to a lonely farm, I admit to a quiet cry occasionally.

In 1942 I volunteered for a new Armoured Division (the 11th) and was posted to Yorkshire. For the next two years it was intensive training for the invasion of the Continent. Four days after D-Day I landed on Juno Beach and as the war progressed, fought our way from France, Belgium, Holland and across Germany. I was now a seasoned soldier, but still pursuing my hobby whenever possible of collecting newspapers published by the Partisans. My mother I could rely on, who saved the Daily News Chronicle and Telegraph. After all, the wartime slogan was 'Save paper!!'

In late 1944, victory was in sight and the first demobilisation chart was published, my demob number was 27. For the first time I began to experience apprehension about civvy street. I had joined the Army as a boy, I was now a man. Valuable years of my life were spent in uniform and the thought of a 9-5.30 existence and same old daily routine worried me. But home was my anchor and throughout the war my dear mother, brothers and sisters had supported me. I was coming home; but did they know I had changed? I kept my fears and thoughts to myself. No counsellors!

In April 1946, I left Germany and was demobbed to Aldershot and walked up the garden path with a cardboard box containing my single breasted suit and trilby. I was reluctant to change and every day of my three month paid demob leave I wore my uniform. Finally, and with the consternation of my mother, family and friends, I resigned from Unilever and applied to London Transport as a bus conductor! After training at Chiswick I was assigned to a bus garage, just five minutes walk from my home. So here once more I was in uniform, wearing my medal ribbons with pride, a very well paid job, free travel and the luxury of a home.

You could easily spot the ex-servicemen as conductors - medal ribbons, highly polished boots, creased trousers and also highly polished leather straps holding the money bag. I was in clover - good wage, unmarried, didn't drink or smoke and just carefree and enjoying a mobile job. However, after six years I did finally rehabilitate myself to civvy street. Tired of shift work and worried of being a conductor for years and years, so I resigned and returned to the office as a clerk with Sanderson Wallpaper and later became a manager. I then met a German Au Pair girl, married and had two sons and now four grand-children. My stay in Germany as a member of the Army of Occupation also had a strong influence on me. I went to Germany as an enemy and left as a friend.

Oh yes, the newspapers. My collecting knew no bounds. By the early 1960's I had amassed thousands with overseas contacts and started an archive business. An archive of 150,000 editions dating back to 1630. World War II section contains over 1,500 UK, USA, Dutch and French Newspapers, so I am still occupied with 1939/45 events. So when anyone asks 'What did you do in the war?' I reply 'I survived to read all about it!'

Blair's Britain is not the Britain we fought for. So many day to day problems with NHS, crime, British Identity, P.C, gay marriages, and lack of respect by many youngsters and lack of discipline. It's all so very sad and I feel for my grandchildren's future.

Good Luck
John Frost

Dear Mr Pringle

I refer to your letter in the Solihull Times, re; war days. I joined the Royal Marines in 1941, I served in North Africa and returned to the UK in January 1944 to serve in RM 48 Commando, which was then being formed in readiness for Operation

Overlord. I won my green beret at Acnacarry, the Commando training school in Scotland.

We landed in Normandy on D-Day and suffered very heavy casualties, continued through France to Belgium where we trained for further amphibious landings at Walchren on November 1st. We were active in the Maas area until May 1945, various duties in Germany until I was demobbed in February 1946.

After the wonderful comradeship of a small fighting unit both of officers and men, I found it most difficult to settle down in Civvy Street. I had made lifelong friends in the Marines and am still privileged to still meet them at re-unions today.

I had lost many comrades who had done their bit to stop England being invaded. Regrettably, I have to admit that the country we fought for 60 odd years ago is not the same country today. I feel we have been invaded and are now governed from Brussels.

Thinking back it seems hard to believe that in the blackout women could walk alone and feel safe. Yes we were hungry, but everyone pulled together and made the best of it.

Good Luck

Marine Clive Pitt

Sir

I was a 13 year old schoolgirl, when war was declared on 3rd September 1939. We went to the school at 10am on that morning, then sent home until after Chamberlain's speech just after 11am, to return to school at 2pm to be evacuated or not. In the interval between 11am and 2pm, an echelon of flight of fighters flew over our house, then peeled off one by one, a wonderful sight. The siren had started just before they appeared. I lived in Mitcham, then 10 miles from London and very near Croydon, and subsequently - Kenley, Whiteleaf etc. fighter stations of the RAF.

We went back to school and my younger brother (six years) and me were evacuated to Chichester, (19 miles from Portsmouth) what planning!! We were finally placed in a house. I was welcomed, because I did housework and the ironing before I went to school. My brother was there on sufferance and picked on all the time, so I told him to save his sweets etc and we would run away, which we did, eventually, a few weeks later. We only had a small suitcase so it wasn't too difficult to escape. We caught the train to Wimbledon, then walked home! Mother was surprised to see us, but very pleased also. My brother was sent to relatives in Liverpool, where his school were evacuated to Maestag, North Wales. It would be about four years before I saw him again.

I went back to school, but it was very disjointed, and nothing much took place. I left school when I was 14 years old, and worked locally at first, there I met a French girl 'Cecile' who had escaped from France. We were having nuisance flights then, the German's coming over in the daytime, and used to fire their guns at us. The windows

would be broken, and some near misses for the personnel.

I then went to work with my elder sister in the NAAFI (The Navy, Army & Air Force Institutes) Headquarters, in Broadwick St. Piccadilly. All through the London Blitz, we travelled into London, in an open back lorry with benches to sit on, which had been organised by the NAAFI, just to get to work. At the end of the day, one made one's own way home, which could be quite difficult, especially if there was an air raid on, because the watertight doors under the Thames were shut and the underground didn't run. Many times my sister and I walked the 10 miles homes - with bombs falling, and shrapnel from the guns, running up and down the roads. We learned to recognise the different guns firing. We also did fire watching at night, in the dark, during air-raids, and putting out the fire bombs, with sand etc. The sirens invariably went (for a time) every night at dusk, and the raid was on, until the 'all clear', approximately 8am in the morning.

All I longed for was for time to fly, so that I could 'join up'. My eldest brother was now in India with the RAF. My sister was in the WAAF. In 1944, when I was 18 years old, I joined the W.R.N.S, as Communications. 'Bunts' crossed flags on my sleeve. In the build up to the Normandy Landings, I served in 'The Tunnel' at Fort Southwick, for very long hours at a stretch. We were using radio telephones, and finally the Radio Monitoring Unit, (the fore runner of mobile telephones.) I had volunteered for overseas, but needed my parents permission, as I was not 21 years old. They signed the form for 'Service in France', but I added 'and elsewhere' and in 1945 I went to Ceylon, where I stayed until 1946.

In those days people were orderly, kept the laws of the country, were polite and courteous. Gentlemen raised their hats to greet one, stood up when a lady entered the room, offered one a seat etc. Life was orderly. People in the main, apart from dialects, spoke the King's English. Everybody looked clean and wholesome, especially the females. We still didn't have much money, whatever, but we were contented and happy. People still whistled and sang. There was STILL ENGLAND, our country, which we had fought for, our freedom, democracy. Where is it now??!!!

Churchill once said "Beware the secret army." That is what has happened. I'm sure Blair stood for power solely to destroy ENGLAND. We are not an area, we are a country, but it has been given away to foreigners, who receive far more from this government than we the veterans receive. It is the same generation, who fought for freedom, who are having to sell their homes for care, who are being refused medical services, because incomers come first, who can only afford to exist (just) instead of enjoying the rest of their lives.

We are affronted by the appearance of Muslims and Sikhs costumes on our streets. Our cities are more Asian than Calcutta and Pakistan. Our freedom has been eroded. This is England, and one has to be 'White Caucasian' to be English. There are no white Chinese, white African etc. etc. No way can they be English.

Our girls are looked down upon, because they have let themselves down, by their behaviour, and dress. They are so obvious it's embarrassing.

Our 'cream', who didn't return home, would say "What did I get killed, or injured for?" The tortures of our Jap P.O.W's - What was it for? When one looks at this

country, one is ashamed of the filth, of the crimes. Blair and his Scots Cronies should be 'indicted for treason'.

If I could win the lottery I would leave this country to its decomposing. My country not theirs.

Sarah Robinson

Howdy Mr Pringle

Regarding your local paper article for information on disaffected Victorian parents raised and educated, patriotic ex-servicemen of WWII. I'll give you my tirade on the subject, for what it's worth.

I was one of six children raised by a crippled father, (gardener) earning a pittance of the twenties, which only just paid the rent and food, (ie. bread and marge, and jam on Sundays, with a lump of Caraway seed cake if lucky.) I worked from the age of eight, after school and weekends, haymaking, digging, ditching, and fencing, errand boy etc. etc. My schooling taught me the elements to get by, which has all been eroded away by this modern government.

I now find I am in an alien world, uneducated to understand the measurements, quantities, distances of the present day. Even the money has changed from its original format and has quadrupled beyond belief. From a pre war society up bringing of Victorian standards of morals and manners when gambling was a crime, and games on Sunday was taboo, I find todays uncontrolled society decadent, immoral, selfish, un-Christian, unsocial, with an obsession for money like no other. The Government condones this as moneylenders abound and advertise openly and daily.

The present day Government is inept, the police are on the whole transparent, in the light of a terrorist attack the Government handed it to the police on a plate with no outcry from the military services? Whose job is it to deal with such matters, but in the light of day what do peoples opinions matter? As for the opinions of my fallen comrades, I feel I can speak for them all. It would be a different place today, as the vote at the end of the war proved.

Anything goes now, ruled by these public school twits. Refugees and immigrants now dictate their own rules and conduct and the Government pays; NO control over them. The country has gone to the dogs, my patriotism has gone out the window. The television, by stealth has become womenized and kinderized, the women now out number the men on the box.

SERVICE RECORD

Rank; Able Seaman, Royal Navy Commando, Mine Sweeping Submarine Service. 1942, HMS Armadillo, Commando Training Centre, Achnacarry, Scotland. Troopship - Highland Chieftain to Durban Clairwood Camp, Tassigi Camp, then Stirling Castle to Bombay. Truck to Ratigiri, water bourne landings exercises, return to Bombay, to Gujarat to confront Indian National Army (Approx 43,000 in size, the aim of the Indian National Army was to overthrow the British Raj in India, assisted by the Japanese. It

was largely made up of Indian prisoners of war captured by the Japanese in their Malayan campaign and at Singapore, later on it attracted large numbers of volunteers from Indian expatriate population in Malaya and Burma.), reconnoitre Andaman Sea for Jap Subs. Return to Bombay, train to Poona, then dry kit, field exercises. To Calcutta, HMS Braganza, transfer to HMS Jalapadna for Burma, arrive Chittagong. 1943. Transit to Arakan, Pigstick Cox's Bazar (Located 100 miles from Chittagong, now part of modern day Bangladesh, Cox's Bazar derives its name from Captain Cox (died 1798), an army officer serving in British India.), Akyab, Maungdaw, Buthidaung. Invalided out - Hospital ship to Calcutta, then Lucknow, then Delhi. Discharged fit, return Calcutta, RTO passage to Burma; passage cancelled - unit in Bombay. Report Wodehouse Barracks to rejoin unit. Board the Duchess of Bedford. Disembark Port Said, transfer to Kabrit SAS Base, HMS Saunders (The camp at Kabrit was used to prepare troops for depth attacks on the enemy including sea-borne landings that were being planned.) 1944. Basic training then enship to Taranto (Italy), train to Manfredonia, operations Pescara, Ischia, Cassino, Ancona, Rimini, Lake Trasimeno (training fantails), Ravenna, Balogna, transfer to Leghorn (Livorno), passage to Genova return to Napoli, which won. Stumps drawn. Back to Blighty, Chatham RNB, MGB 217 Minesweeper, Sheerness to Ostende. End of hostilities. 1945. Transfer to submarines and general service.

INDIA - RANN OF KUTCH

Hardships. we was having them before the dead sea died. On that volcanic plain the Rann of Kutch (10,000 sq miles of salty clay desert in Gujarat province India) we, a party of 20 or so, were holed up in one of the little quarries and far away to the east, was a glint of water, so it was decided to set off across the plains to do a spot of dhobi-ing. (washing - dhobi is Hindi for washing and became commonly used by British servicemen from the Raj days onwards.), About half a dozen of us in single file, we entered the edge of the jungle and followed the ravine down the hillside, near the lake we were stopped by three pillars of rock leaned against each other, leaving a narrow opening for one person to slip through. The sides of the ravine were sheer rock. Lofty went first, I followed, but was blocked by Lofty who kicked back into my chin. I got me head out through his arm and oh God! Trapper behind me was shoving me up the arse and I with my blood running cold, and mouth as dry as a chickens arse, could only squeak as in front of Lofty was this ginormous great python staring him straight in the eyes, and Lofty is six foot. It was in the stream, draped out about 15 to 20 foot long. The water fifteen foot on dropped over a rock. It looked at Lofty, flicking its tongue. Trapper kept pushing me, we was completely snookered, how long we stood there God knows, but eventually it lowered its coils and went over the edge of the rock and disappeared. We ran to the edge of the rock, but it was in the rock pool below. Went back up that ravine faster than Malcolm Campbell! (Racing driver who broke land and water speed records in the 20s and 30s. In 1935 he became the first man to travel over 300mph in a car, and in the month before the outbreak of war in 1939 set the world water speed record of 141.7mph. His son Donald Campbell followed in his father's footsteps and broke more land and water speed records until his death in 1967 on Coniston Water, in the Bluebird K7 whilst attempting to go over 300mph, having successfully driven it on the lake at 297mph. He got it to 320 mph before the boat

crashed.) Now if that's not vivid I don't know what is. I got used to them after that, but still get the Siddi Barranis when I think of it.

HOSPITAL WOE

For 18 months I had been plagued with a boil/abscess/carbuncle on my left leg that came and went. We were holed up in a bombed out casa (house) on Nisida, just outside Naples. The girls were there to do your dhobi-ing, I was sat on a stone wall and one of them was pulling the hairs out of my legs. I never felt it, not till I caught her at it. However, days later I keeled over, flaked out a couple of times. Then my temperature hit 104, and they carted me off to a pukka hospital. Cor! white sheets, crumpet skipping around, Gawd it was like heaven, proper girls, things you can only dream about.

But, the dramatic was what the scab lifter (doctor) said 'There was 48 hours left before amputation of the left leg'. Oh! My giddy bloody aunt. "But first we will try this new drug that has just come out called Penicillin, an injection every four hours." Please dear God look down on me, septicemia of the left leg. It was dead, they pushed needles in but no feeling. God bless Doc Fleming (Sir Alexander Fleming had been a captain (M.I.D) in the Royal Army Medical Corps during World War One and had seen many men die of septicemia and noted anti-septics were not effective. After the war he began research into anti-bacterial agents and in 1928 discovered Penicillin. After the bombing of Pearl harbour it began to be made in large quantities and saved the lives of countless Allied injured. In 1945 mass production began and some estimates say it has saved the lives of over 200 million people since it was discovered. He died in 1955 and his ashes were interred in St Pauls Cathedral.) After several days his Penicillin brought it back to life, and there I am thinking of a beautiful Mahogany peg leg with a brass ring in the end, walking down the street going home. Ha! The thoughts of mice and men. Still this left leg has stood up well, to all I have put it through. So all is well.

TROOPSHIP

An account of my passage on the Highland Chieftain. The victuals were, to say the least tragic. The cooks hadn't got a clue, dinner was one cabbage leaf, a lump of beef 4x4, like a lump of leather, watery spuds, and a bit of yorkshire, as hard as cattle cake. At mealtimes our orderly officer and sergeant shot through the bulkhead doors, yelling out "Any complaints!" utter silence, until breakfast one morning. It was hard boiled eggs, ye Gawds, they were like cannon balls, the yolks were green inside! The Kings officer and his winger came through the bulkhead door, with the usual "Any complaints!" and brother they coped the lot, around iron hard eggs. They scarpered off back through the mess and bolted the doors and placed guards each side. We were locked down there for a day. Mutineers they said!

Another incident aboard that rust bucket. It had a 6 inch gun mounted aft on the stern deck, they decided to do an exercise shoot. Everyone was shut below deck and 'Bang!' went this progge (Shell), holy cow? The mess deck tables were pushed up to the deck head when not in use, hanging by an iron bracket. The vibration released all the brackets. The tables came down plus all cups, plates and utensils; smashed the lot! Plus bloody great chunks of painted rust off the deck head, mate, it don't get much better

than this in Dad's Army, and thus Mr Churchill's grand army staggered on. To add to your humiliation in Durban where we were expelled, they issued us with typical KD kit, and believe it or not, the shorts and shirts were blinking orange??? Bluddy kit left over from the Boer War and a right laughing stock we were when we marched ashore in Bombay!!!

Perhaps I should tell you about my first khaki suit, issued at RN Cdo dept, Armadillo. We were lined up alongside the jetty at the end of Loch Long, alongside a landing craft, ordered to go aboard and grab one blouse and one pair of trousers. Double back and get fell in...they eyeball the suit! Me blood froze, they still had H.L.I (Highland Light infantry) shoulder flashes on, and stained with dry blood, (they were taken from the dead in North Africa) had to go back to the billet and soak them in the showers. A tailor altered them to suit.

By the way we left Durban on the Stirling Castle. The Highland Chieftain was on the Atlantic run along with other ships on that route. Her run was to Montevideo to embark stores - meat etc, then up to the States, Boston, for food and war supplies, then onto Halifax, Canada, for war supplies and the convoy assembled there for the run to England, either north of Ireland or the southern run. Awaiting them were the wolf pack subs, that was the murderous route of these Merchant Navy ships. The survivors of ships sunk were picked up on this route and dropped off in either Cape Town or Durban, and placed in a distressed seaman's depot, a building with hammock rails for your bed and trestle tables and forms. These poor baskets to get home went back by the route described, but at Halifax they deserted right, left and centre. To run the gauntlet of getting back across the Atlantic was not on. We shared the D.S.D with them, some were twice sunk and only had the duds they were stood up in!? (Hardships mate, you don't know what hardships are, I kid you not)!!

BURMA

The sun blazes down, anything from 120 to 140. Your skin just breaks up. There's every biting thing in the world flying about out there - the mosquitoes being the worst of the lot - and every kind of illness.

You wake up in the morning and go through your drill, you take a salt tablet, and they give you a chlorine tablet for the water - which is down a well covered in green slime.

So you go on and on and on until you fall over. Then they put you on a bamboo stretcher and carry you out. That's how I came out. If you died, they buried you were you fell and stuck your bayonet in the ground and put your bloody tin hat on it and walked off.

I was bunged on a little put put down the Chung (river). There was an Aussie driver and a Japanese prisoner of war. And the Japanese was busy with a safety pin trying to dig his brains out; trying to commit hari-kiri. He was trying to dig his brains out with a pin - until I alerted the Aussie and he promptly walloped him and threw him over the side.

People don't know anything about the war - just like those bloody Members of Parliament. As long as the money's coming in and they can get their hands on it, why

worry about tomorrow?

There you go then, that's my diatribe of the once proud country that spawned me. I sing no song for England and wonder why I even tried.

All the best

'Jungle' George Fagence

p.s Excuse writing. Rough and ready like me!!

Dear Nick

I read your query to the Belfast Telegraph on the Internet, re; your research for WWII experiences, and your name struck a sentimental chord with me, memories of an eminent War Correspondent Photographer, Jim Pringle, whose career I followed for years after I last saw him.

We met when he first came to SHAEF (Supreme Hqs Allied Expeditionary Force) for accreditation to the press corp, his first important assignment after leaving the Connacht Tribune (a weekly) in his native Galway City, Ireland. We became immediate friends and were fortunate to run into each other a few more times in odd places on the Continent before the war ended.

After the war, he hooked up with other news services, among them LIFE Magazine, where once I saw a full page shot he'd taken of a man jumping mid air from a dock-side vessel in some foreign port, Middle East I believe. I don't recall the story but it was a place of turbulence, one of Jim's favourite haunts. He covered the first Arab-Israeli war and I recall seeing one of his horror shots of a Brit soldier who'd been captured by one of the Jewish guerilla forces, hanged and booby-trapped in an olive grove in Palestine, shortly before the Brits abandoned the Mandate. I saw his obituary in the American papers in the fifties or early sixties, and believe he died in New York State of Tuberculosis, a not too uncommon occupational hazard of 'committed' War Correspondents of Jim's generation.

Good Luck

John P'O Toole, Maryland, USA

Dear Mr Pringle

After reading your letter in my local paper, and being very impressed, I decided to reply.

I was attached to War Office Signals during the Second World War, serving mainly in Egypt, Palestine and in Normandy during the invasion.

My 'lot' after the war was good. Being a Research Engineer was very rewarding in all aspects, but I would never fight for my country as it is now.

National Front has come to mind, as with, do we need a monarchy in this day and age? A country should take care of it's sick and aged, it's young, and if you are in-

between you should work.

As a small country we should be and remain English, we have not the room for 'foreigners' with different cultures.

Firmer ways must be implemented to stop drug suppliers. If you want democracy you must fight for it, but the way it has now become, is democracy out of date?

Ah well, all for now.

Peter

Dear Mr Pringle

With reference to your letter published in the local Guardian. I served in the WAAF and my brother was killed in the RAF. I adjusted to life after the war easily, but find it difficult now that we have handed our country over to alien countries and religions.

I belong to the women's section of the RBL and I am a volunteer in a hospice shop. Most of the women I meet are about my age and we all feel appalled that the Britain we fought for has been swamped by ungrateful immigrants.

None of us would again volunteer to help what is left of Britain. A sad thought! We all agree that we would not want to be young again.

Yours Sincerely
Margaret

Mr Pringle,

My name is I.W Chappell, I am 82 years old. I live in Bedfordshire in a village on the outskirts of Bedford. Herewith, a few World War 2 memories of which I have so many. I came from a family of 8 children. In this war to end all wars, (again???) when I look back I see so very much to be proud of, like this! But we never talked a lot about it then, it was just part of our lives.

My father, ex World War 1 veteran, a time served soldier of 21 years in the Beds and Herts Regiment, went all over the world. As soon as it started up my dad was in the front to volunteer for the then L.D.V (Local Defence Volunteers), later called the Home Guard. All through World War 2 my dad worked as a cook, (we didn't have chefs then in our world.) He cycled 4 miles to work and 4 home every day, in charge of a works kitchen and about 10 women! He cycled a mile each way to a dug-out on the edge of a field. At first they had about 2 rifles to share among probably 15 men, although things did get better a year or so later. My dad was always a soldier, here he was serving his country again, a rifle in his hand and in khaki once more. He went all the way through, 'till the Home Guard were stood down with a grateful countries

thanks, takes a lot of those to fill a pint pot!!

I had three elder brothers, one became a drill sergeant for about 5 years, he was attached to one of the Guard's regiments in the blitz on London, on duty to help prevent looting I believe, he came through OK. He had a beautiful house and garden, a good wife, a little dog, a steady job, everything was on the up! Volunteered for the army, he said it was so he could volunteer and choose where he would go and not be pushed. He finished up in the Beds and Herts Regiment, Dads old regiment! After the war, their lovely house was a shambles as was the once lovely garden. Let out to local Air Force personnel, who couldn't have cared less. His wife wouldn't stay there on her own! So they let it out and she went home to live with her parents.

A second brother living in a small village, had a good job in Luton, working for Vauxhall Motors. He also volunteered to go where he wanted to, this was the Royal Army Ordinance Corps. After being shunted around for some time he got sent abroad. He left behind a wife and two children and a nice little cottage. They moved out and they also went and lived with Mum. This brother served four, repeat four years, out in the Middle East, all through the Desert Campaign, a Desert Rat, captured out of Tobruk, escaped walked back to our lines somehow, a long time in hospital, they still kept him out there for four years. Now is it six months and they start crying? No disrespect but?? Anyway, he came through and made it home to start all over again thank the Lord!

My third brother became a paratrooper, he was always devil may care. After some training, was it 7 drops to get his Para wings?; he proudly came home with them up. He took time out to get married to a Yorkshire lass from Wakefield. On a troopship he sailed around South Africa, up the Canal, the Med was well covered at that time by the Germans, although we got it altered later on! So this brother also did, I believe, at least three years out in the Middle East and was in the Italian Campaign. He came home to demob again thank the Lord, lived at Wakefield and became a Coal Miner!

Then we come to little old me, called up at age 18, early 1943, a callow youth. The furthest I have ever travelled was to Southend on a cubs outing, the most I'd drank was half pint in a jugs department at a local pub and that was only to try it out. I was as I now know, so naive! So artless! I was working in the pink brick dust, or in the the black coal dust of a local brick-yard, for which this area was noted for over many years! The manager came to me one day to ask me if I'd like to be classified as a skilled brick-yard worker and kept back out of the armed services, he thought he could swing it. He seemed so surprised when I turned down the opportunity to be put in a 'reserved occupation'. My pay then was £2-£3 a week of 50 hours of sweat!

I had a pal Reg who was a work-mate in the same yard doing the same jobs as me. My pal Reg and I had birthdays in the same month. He was 1st October, mine was the 25th. We registered one Saturday afternoon for war service. We worked together in the yard, we got on fine, he already had a mate from his village, talk about irony? When we registered in our age group we were asked what branch of the service we would like to serve in. We chose the Navy, sometime later that's what we got. We had to pass a medical in a back street old school in Cambridge. We had to pass 8 doctors. Here we learned how to be induced to pass urine for tests, here rather embarrassingly we found out how to walk about naked? Us old boys had much to learn? A petty officer to me

"Can you swim boy?" I said "No." He said, "What, no bloody duck ponds round your way?" We passed A1, we had an intelligence test, (our first glimpse of a Wren) passed that too. Reg and I went home 10 feet tall! Our parents weren't very happy though!

Then the long wait began. "Any mail Mum?", "No." "Any mail today Mum?" "No, stop asking, it's too upsetting!". Reg and I got called up together, the best part of a 20 hour rail journey, North Wales, a place called HMS Glendower, a Butlins holiday camp commandeered by the Navy! It's still there to this day? The nearest village I think is a place called Pwllheli. If those Welsh people are still the same to this day, they speak Welsh and they don't like us? We did six weeks seamanship training there, more doctors, injections with blunt needles, medicals!

Got a long weekend leave, different route, only about 6 hours travel this time each way, came back, got moved to an old hospital in Liverpool Docks converted into a naval gunnery school. Here we learned all types of gunnery, barrage balloons, used to put off dive bombers, aircraft recognition, British, American, German and Italian aircraft, guns from a point 22 rifle, up to a 6 inch anti submarine gun, very frightening! We'd passed out at seamanship and now we sat our gunnery exam, we passed out on this to.

We moved to London on the Thames, an old depot ship, up to Gourock, Scotland, troopsip across to the USA, on the old Queen Mary. My first ship, 18 years old, 3,000 miles from home? Taken out of a pool of gunners, onto a cargo ship as a replacement. The Empire Spartan, in Brooklyn Docks, New York, loaded up with high explosives by the ton, jeeps and a tank or two. It was here that Reg and I were separated. He with some others boarded a train and went right across America to San Fransisco on the Pacific coast. He sailed from there, in fact he went right around the world on his first trip. We were told a long time later that we could have stayed together if we'd asked! Some time later when we got home we were told about Reg's old pal, Joe. He was a year younger than us, when he registered for service. He did so want to join the Navy like his pal, but was told "Not this time, can't fit you in." So he went for a Royal Marine, no not there either, finished up in the Army. To cut a long story short, his name is on the War Memorial in his village, he is 18 years old for evermore! His name is just below his brothers, need I say more?

South Atlantic, North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the North Sea, the Bay of Biscay, the English Channel. Demob in 1946. The heroes welcome home only from my mum and sisters. Nobody bothered, there were too many of us. My unit was called D.E.M.S. This stood for Defensive Equipped Merchant Ships, nobodies heard of us. I've been told there were 25,000 of us and 5,000 never came home. We were classed as Royal Navy, but to me in reality I served as an anti aircraft gunner on merchant ships, the only time I was R.N was in barracks, which I hated!

I was demobbed after a long wait off HMS President along the Thames Embankment, Blackfriars, London, 1946, from where I had started out 3 years earlier! My pal Reg came home like me, no Joe now, so we became mates, back to the brick yard we went, the country needed bricks to rebuild! But now we stood proud.

All the Best, Sincerely

Mr I Chappell

Dear Nick Pringle

In our local Salisbury Journal you ask for WW2 memories. I trained as a State Registered Sick Childrens Nurse at Great Ormond Street and in February '39 qualified and my salary rose to £40 p.a! Big money! With 5 friends we hired a Hansom Cab 7/6 and went to Saddlers Wells Ballet. Tickets cost 1/- if we climbed up many stairs to sit in the gods (gallery).

I stayed on all through the war as trained nurses were in big demand. We had to carry our gas masks and wear a tin hat when we went out during the times of air raids. Nurses were not allowed out in uniform. We were not allowed out in uniform. We had not heard of MRSA!

We were on duty at 8am to 8pm with a morning off 10-12 (this often included a one hour lecture, so maybe one hour free) twice a week, 2-5pm and twice a week 6-8pm. Half a day off a week and a day off once a month.

But we lived in a nurses home, had uniform, meals in dining hall, and our own bedrooms. During the war Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia fled to England with his family including his daughter Princess Tsahai. She came to train at G.O.S and was very brave, although terrified of air raids. On a day off we went to Kew Gardens and she was very impressed.

So now it is 2006, I am 89 years old, and lucky to still live in my own cottage. My husband died in 1980 and I have a lovely daughter and grand-daughter living only 35 miles away and they come for the day when they can, and we go for a drive in the beautiful New Forest. My mobility is poor but I have good friends who take me shopping, the post office and church.

Yours Truly
Angela Moules

Dear Mr Pringle

I am replying to your letter in a recent edition of the Surrey Herald. I was born in 1922, in Sunbury on Thames, where I lived until I became married in 1959 and moved to Shepperton. My secondary education was at Hampton Grammar School from 1934 to July, 1939. Employment was still difficult to get in 1939, but I was introduced to a small firm of Lloyds Insurance Brokers in the City of London and on 1st January 1940 began work with them as an office boy for £1 per week.

Summer of 1940 joined the L.D.V, (Local Defence Volunteers)- Upper Thames Patrol. The L.D.V was subsequently re-named Home Guard. (The Home Guard by June, 1940 had over one million volunteers. They were to be the last line of defence against a full German invasion. Armed with nothing more than old WW1 rifles, swords, forks,

pistols and anything else they could get their hands on at the height of the threat of invasion, they were prepared to put up a hopelessly under armed but ferocious defence. By war's end 1,600 had been killed in active service. 137 medals and commendations were awarded for brave conduct and this included two George Crosses. Awards were won for actions during air raids, grenade practice accidents, bomb disposal, rescues from crashed aircraft, etc.) I was entrusted with guarding Shepperton Lock two or three times a week. I also undertook fire watching duties at 15 Queen Street, London, EC3 my then place of employment. On 30th November at Miskin's Farm, Fordingbridge Road, Sunbury injured in endeavouring to extinguish an incendiary bomb during an air-raid. The bomb exploded. After discharge from hospital circa March 1941 returned to work in the City.

On 7th October 1941, volunteered and was accepted for the Royal Armoured Corps and was posted to 61st Training Regiment R.A.C at Tidworth, Wiltshire. After various postings, which I cannot recall, I spent some time at Barnard Castle, Co. Durham. From thence I was posted to 155 R.A.C (15th Durham Light Infantry) who were based in the grounds of Lowther Park near Penrith. They were being trained on a secret weapon code named CDL - this was a searchlight mounted in a tank's turret. I was at Lowther Camp from late 1942 until spring of 1944, when I and others were sent to join the 11th Royal Tank Regiment, at Trenorgan in Wales who had returned from the Middle East where they also had trained on CDL but like us not required to use it on active service.

On 30th May 1944 with our CDL tanks, which were General Grants with the CDL searchlight mounted in the turret, we travelled to Gosport, Hants to be ready for D-Day. After a long wait we were transported to France by USA tank landing craft in July 1944 and eventually ended up at Montilly in Normandy. There we camped surrounded by dead cattle, creating an unfortunate smell but with no sign that our secret weapon was to be called into action at last. Then on 30th August 1944 we were sent to Tamise in Belgium where we learnt we were to be crash trained on lightly armoured amphibians called Buffaloes. These came from the Americans who had used them for assaults on Japanese held islands in the Pacific.

I recall our training was on canals and the river Rupel at a small town called Rupelmonde. We were introduced to the Buffalo and trained by Royal Engineers - Armoured Vehicles Royal Engineers (AVREs). Exactly how and when we learned we were to be used in the Battle of the Scheldt, to enable the port of Antwerp to be used for Allied shipping, I do not recall. Anyway, in October we moved into the vicinity of Terneuzen in Holland for the purpose of assaulting South Beveland and Walcheren. The full story is in the books 'The Eighty Five Days' and 'The Battle of the Sheldt'.

After this was over, I was involved in some minor skirmishes at S'Hertogenbosch, the Noorder and Wessen Canals and Nijmegen all during November 1944. In December it seemed we might be called in to help repel the German offensive in the Ardennes but instead a number of us from the 11th RTR were posted to the Royal Scot Greys who, with other units of the 4th Independent Armoured Brigade, were resting at Sommeren in South Holland preparatory to a spring offensive. The Greys had Sherman tanks and I was in 'B' Squadron. The events in which I was involved including

the taking of Bremen and crossing the Rhine are detailed in the book 'Second to None'. We finally ended up at Wismar on the Baltic where we shook hands with the Russians and the war in Europe was over. I was suffering a bit from my old incendiary bomb wounds so was fortunately flown by Dakota to one of the British military hospitals in Brussels. Thereafter, I was flown back to England and put on an ambulance train. I was transported to Horton Hospital, Epsom, part of which was then being used as a military hospital. From there a bit of skin grafting on my foot at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead and then to convalescence with the Army at a camp in Richmond Park. Then to RAC Corps HQ at Catterick N Yorks and from there a posting to the tank firing range at Warcop in Westmoreland, finally to discharge in February 1947.

I returned to work in the City with my original employers and remained with them, until I finally retired in 1996 aged 74 years.

To put it briefly in my view this country has 'gone to the dogs'. I lost a number of close friends in the last World War and I am sure if they, by some miracle, returned they would be appalled by the state of the kingdom they fought and died for. The War Memorials at my school bear the names of nearly 300 who were killed in two World Wars - pupils and masters.

What have we done to deserve many of the politicians we have suffered from? In my view taking us into the EU was an insult to the British Commonwealth of Nations who, as the British Empire, served us so well, particularly in the World Wars. The one good thing about Charles De Gaulle was his continuous 'Non' to our entry whereas I and many others have never forgiven Edward Heath for leading us into the European Union. On this point and others I attach a copy of a letter I sent to David Cameron in July 06. If you find the time to read this you will see it covers other matters which have degraded this once fine nation. I find it difficult to believe we enjoy a proper democracy when the politicians fail to allow us a referendum on the EU and also a vote on the return of capital and corporal punishment.

Yours Sincerely
D.E Davidson

Dear Mr Pringle

Re; your letter in our local paper, I thought I would drop you a brief line, although I have run out of my usual notepaper. I have a little time to spare during holidays.

I am a war veteran, as I joined the W.R.N.S when I was 17 years old, and must confess I enjoyed my time immensely, in fact they were the best years of my life. I am a member of the RNA and the Association of Wrens. I served in the Fleet Air Arm, mainly in Scotland, as a wireless telegraphist, and then as a VHE/DF operator, which I guess was the beginning of air traffic control. This is a brief description of my job, but it was quite a responsibility for a young girl. We must have been made of sterner stuff in those days! We also enjoyed a great social life. I eventually got demobbed, married a sailor,

and had a family.

I didn't like settling down to civilian life, I found it very boring, and in hindsight, wish I had stayed in the Navy and made a career of it, Ah well!

I despair of this country and of the world today. I think it is in a terrible state. The Middle East, in particular, cannot live in peace, all due to religion. The Muslims especially are intolerant and want to take over this country, and the MP's are letting them. The influx of immigrants should never have taken place. Although there are many good ones, some of their cultures have been very, very bad for us. Their use of drugs, knives and guns were alien to our culture, but not now.

Regards
Jacqueline Wolsey

Dear Mr Pringle

I was most intrigued with your request in the Grantham Journal, as I was a WAAF and my husband also in the RAF. After demob he was offered work in forestry or on the railways. To start we had accommodation in rooms as accommodation was difficult to find, but my mother had a stroke, so we moved into her home to care for her.

Then my husband obtained forestry work on a private estate with tied accommodation close by, where we stayed for 45 years. Wages were never spectacular on the farm labouring basis, but our cottage rates etc were free and I did various work; domestic, hotel and home help to boost finances. We had one daughter so never qualified for a family allowance and we, by then, had my parents living with us, but in those days there was no financial assistance to care for families as compared with these days of care allowances, so saving was quite a problem. At 79 my husband had a massive stroke completely paralysing his right side. He received very good care for 6 months in Grantham Hospital, but developed problems and died and I moved to council accommodation.

I do feel now though that there is no longer a Gt Britain. Our country and what we fought Hitler for, freedom and pride in our country, it is now just a multi cultural society who think they have more right to our social services as a right, even those who have never contributed to the system. They get better care financially than us oldies who have paid our National Insurance and taxes all our life. The ***** hold us to blackmail with this fanatical suicidal madness and preach hatred of us whilst being on our social service.

Europeans have moved in by the thousands, legally or otherwise, and are taking employment from our tradesmen by accepting lower wages, part of which they send back to their families at home, taking money out of our country and our stupid politicians seem unable to see what's happening. The nanny state has literally ruined what we were rigidly taught; good manners and respect for older people. Now murder by knife and gun is the in thing and next to no deterrent, a few years in cushy prison accommodation or else they get free solicitors to prove abuse of human rights.

Technology has over taken our lifestyle. Again all the TV programmes are aimed at the young, full of violence and obscene language, nothing for all us older housebound folk who would love some good old humour and nostalgic music if only for an hour here or there.

I certainly feel we can no longer feel proud of our country and the behaviour which is now accepted as normal and we are no longer proud to belong to Land of Hope and Glory. It's a land of yobs, drug addicts, drunkard youths and teenage mothers who think they are owed all for nothing. At 85 I'm just hoping I'm not in this land for much longer and my daughter and family say when I'm not here they will certainly emigrate to New Zealand as they don't like being ruled by Brussels and Muslims.

Anon

Dear Nick

After serving in the Army I was discharged after being wounded in the head and thigh while serving in Italy during the 2nd World War. (Mr Weston joined the Territorials as a Gunner in 265 Field Battery in 1938, aged 16. At the outbreak of war he was too young to go overseas and was posted to Kent to help man anti aircraft guns defending Manston airfield. During the Battle of Britain the guns successfully brought down a number of German planes. In 1942, now aged 18 he was posted to North Africa with the Royal Artillery as part of the 8th Army. After a 1,000 mile trip through Egypt, Iraq and Iran and then back to Egypt, he was transferred to the Infantry who were short of men. His first posting was with the 7th Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, which received such heavy casualties it hadn't enough men for battalion strength, so Bill then joined the 2/5 Queens Regiment. Advancing forward through Italy, attempting to break 'the Gothic Line' he remembers shells landing and mates screaming as they were blown apart. Each soldier carried a blanket which was to be used for their own burial. He remembers digging 3ft shallow graves and burying men in their blankets as soon as it was possible. They were then dug up later by follow up units and taken for proper burials in what are now war cemeteries. Bill's luck ran out when he was seriously injured and was hospitalised for 5 months. In the same week, his brother Albert was wounded in Northern France after being shot in the back by a sniper while serving in the Worcestershire Regiment. He remembers Christmas 1944 in a hospital in Ancona. Due to having a skin graft on his thigh, he had to stay in a separate room in isolation to avoid infection. The nurses gathered the beds in the main ward together and as they all sang Christmas carols, he cried for home and his mother.) After a long convalescent period I started back to work in my old job at the sheet metal works. I couldn't settle down there at all, civvy street was not the same for me and I know that if I had not been wounded I would have rejoined the Army. For me the comradeship was first class and I missed it so much.

Now I am 85 years old. I worry about the future because there is too much

drinking and fighting and drugs. When I was a young lad we always saw policemen on duty in town. But not now.

Yours Sincerely
Bill Weston

Tpr. J. Garner, 2Troop, "A" Squadron 7th RTR.

Dear Mr Pringle,
7/8/1941-Oct/1946

I volunteered for the Leicestershire Regiment in May 1941 and eventually was ordered to report to Glen Parva Barracks in South Wigston on 7th August 1941. Here we were kitted out, inoculated and introduced to our platoon NCO's and then started a quick two week training because we were on the move. Where were we going? rumours were rife. One, which was true, was that the ATS were coming to Glen Parva. They did, after we moved out.

We tumbled into the transport wagons and moved off. We were going to Budbrooke Barracks, the home of the Warwickshire Regt. We spilled out of the lorries on the outskirts of Warwick, formed into columns of threes and then marched off through the town and past the racecourse and up to the Barracks, which was to be our home for the next 8 weeks. It was here that we went through lots of route marching, drilling, field craft, physical training and more inoculations. Guard duty came along quite regularly, and plenty of spit and polish. The food was good and plenty of it. I believe this was because we were classed as 'young soldiers'. We did have quite a number that had not reached the age of 18. Also there were those that had been up before the courts and preferred to join up rather than go to jail. This said, I admit I made many good friends amongst them.

Our training finished and we awaited our transfer to the regular Battalions of the Regt. I now transferred to 70th (Young Soldiers) Battalion stationed at London Road drill hall Peterborough.

Here we did more route marching, spit and polish, blancoing, spud bashing, the normal guard duty and quite often "crash guard". This "crash guard" duty was being on call for 24hrs. On receiving a call from the RAF these parties were despatched immediately to the location of crashed airplanes and expected to stay until no longer needed.

Winter saw us moving to Kingscliffe Aerodrome. We arrived to find that it was deserted. No personnel and just one Wellington bomber in a hanger. This period was critical as we were told that enemy paratroops were expected. We soon found out what was expected of us. One hour before dawn we were to be posted around the perimeter and stand down came one hour after first light. The daylight hours were taken up by going to the railway station in the village, unloading rolls and rolls of barbed wire, angle iron posts then fixing them round the perimeter of the 'drome'. We didn't do any

training for the next seven weeks and we didn't even complete the wiring of the aerodrome. We moved again. This time to another 'drome'.

This was Collyweston. A grass airfield but again it was deserted. We all settled to the routine again except this time there was no barbed wire to complete. Once again we had to prepare to guard the 'drome' from an attack from the air. We did make the occasional trip to either the local at Collyweston or take the 'pash wagon' to Peterborough in the evenings. Once again after only a few weeks we moved a little further, this time to the next village of Easton on the Hill.

This time there was no 'stand to' and perimeter guards, normal camp guard, route marches and exercises. By now I had been placed in the Signal Platoon and before long this platoon was billeted in Peterborough itself. St. Paul's Church rooms on Lincoln Rd, was to be our home for the next five or six weeks. Sleeping on the floor this time, no beds but we enjoyed this spell away from the battalion. On the agenda was morse, semaphore, flag signals, heliograph and field service telephones. We returned to Easton and, with better weather, were able to put our newly learned skills into operation.

During the next months we were transported up north somewhere to help out with the harvest and then with the potato picking. We didn't wait long before we moved again, this time to Elton on the A1 just below Stamford. We made ourselves as comfortable as we could in the rectory there. We didn't have time to settle in because we arose in the morning and clambered on to the transport and off we went. We finished up in the fens, debussed at a farm and there we found out what we were to do, sugar beet bashing. The farmer gave us machetes and told us what to do and left us to get on with it. It was back breaking, freezing cold and we had many casualties with cut hands and fingers. The farmer did provide us with hot drinks and I can't remember what we were paid. This work carried on for about two weeks. Everyone was glad to see the last load of beet go and also the last look at the fens.

In November we moved down to St. Albans to take part in various house to house and night exercises. A number of private houses were taken over to accommodate us. I can recall ours in Battlefield Rd.

Two or three weeks we tramped all over St. Albans, roaming the woods at dead of night, attacking the golf course, rushing across to Bedford to engage in street fighting. Our days and nights were busy but it was still church parade on Sundays. On arrival back at Easton, we were told the news that the 70th Battalion of all Regts were being disbanded. It seems that we had done the job of protecting airfields while a new regiment was being formed to do exactly this, and so the R.A.F. Regiment was formed in 1942.

Everyone was eager looking at Company Orders as volunteers were needed in most arms of the forces R.A.F. Regiment, Paratroop Regt. Commandos and many of the Infantry Regt.

Remembering the old army saying 'never volunteer for anything' I didn't. I thought that volunteering for the army was enough, so I waited to find out where they would send me. On 27th December 1942 I exchanged my forage cap for a black beret as I transferred to "Y" Squad 51st Training Regt. Royal Armoured Corps. at Catterick

Camp.

After about 12 weeks of training I passed out as a gunner/operator. This meant that my main task would be turret gunner, and in the event of any changes, made my secondary task would be wireless operator. I was then detailed with approximately 12 more from "Y" Squad to the 107 R.A.C. Kings Own Regt, who were stationed at Farnley Park, Otley, Yorkshire. This proved to be a very pleasant camp, just a 15 minute walk from Otley and in the opposite direction, the village of Poole in Wharfedale.

The tanks we had were Valentines, of which we had no instructions at all. There were a few Churchill's but they were very old and only had 2pdrs, their main armament. We went on the moors, quite often formation training and gunnery practice, but a lot of time was taken up putting out the peat fires we had started. I must say that we were always pleased to see the SALVATION ARMY mobile canteen hove into sight no matter what the weather. We had plenty of sports activities against other units, plenty of dances in the Mechanics Hall in Otley and trips to either Bradford or Leeds.

Once more rumours were about that our C.O. Colonel Gaisford, having been transferred to a Tank Regt, the 107 would be disbanded. It came quite soon, and just two of us, Billy Box and I were transferred to the Tank Regt. So it was sometime in October 1943 we were transported to the 7th R.T.R. at Otterden in Kent. When we arrived at Otterden we reported to H.Q. and were told that the whole Regt. were going on exercises down at Southwick near Brighton on the South Downs. Billy and I stayed at Otterden for a couple of days painting directional Brigade, Regt. and Sqn. signs ready for the second front.

We were then despatched down to Southwick and late evening found us reporting to "A" Sqn. and then to "4" Troop who were billeted in a vacant house, where we bedded on the floor and off to sleep. We woke in the morning to find there had been a gale during the night and we had not heard a thing. Breakfast up and we followed the rest to the marquee and everywhere was chaos. The marquee had been blown down and everything was scattered, tables, benches and forms. We got our breakfast after the waiting and we leaned on the side of a B Echelon lorry parked in the street, sheltered from the wind. Billy and I heard the two in the driver's cab and one started laughing. I had heard that laugh before, then on looking in the cab, I saw Freddy Crowder who also came from Leicester and was in the 70th Battalion with me. He had come straight to the 7th. He had opened the window and was leaning out to talk to us and then said "There's another lad from Leicester here" and with that the other person looked out and I was amazed to find Maurice Ingall, we had been in the same class at school, St. John's Clarendon Park.

Freddy was in the transport troop and Maurice was in 2 Troop. It was the start of a friendship that lasted over 40 years.

Breakfast over, Billy and I reported to our troop officer, who was affectionately known as 'Tiddler' Brown 2nd Lieutenant. He walked with us to 4 troop tanks parked in the suburbs of Southwick and introduced us to the other members of the troop. Here I met the other members of 'Jacko', the Churchill tank that would see us through everything. Another week was spent roaming the Downs and then it was back to Otterden.

The winter months went by and we moved to North Frith Barracks, Blackdown. This was our concentration area, with early morning PT, afternoon sports, the inevitable Bostick waterproofing of the tanks and postal censorship. From the 28th May we were placed on 6hrs notice.

Came the 6th June and having watched all the aircraft and gliders etc. going over, all our thoughts were of home and 'overthere'. One week later we moved off, on 'tracks' to Fort Gower, Gosport. A Nissen built camp, we were to be 'buildup' troops and when the 16th June arrived we left our marshalling area and proceeded to the embarkation camp.

On Sunday the 18th June we were informed to move out. It was a glorious afternoon as we trickled down to the harbour and then onto our LCT's. Each LCT carried 6 Churchill's neatly packed on the open deck and then anchored down with chains. Loading completed we slowly moved out to anchor in our allotted place in the convoy. At 1800 hrs we set sail. As we moved out into the open sea I began to realize that I had never seen the sea as blue as it was, as all our family holidays had been spent on the East coast where the North sea is always a muddy colour. That evening we slept where we could. Came the early hours of the morning, the sea was running high and preventing us to beach. As it was still dark the skipper of the LCT decided to turn out to sea again and drift back to the beach and await light. It was during these manoeuvres that the LCT struck a mine. The explosion holed the craft and damaged the engine room. It also injured the skipper, 4 members of the crew, Lieut. Barret of 5 Troop and our troop officer Lieut. Brown.

We were ordered to stand by our tanks and prepare to abandon ship. Standing by the turret of 'Jacko' our crew discussed what we were going to do if the order came. We had already blown up our 'Mae West's', loosened our boot laces and eyed up the nearest raft. It was beginning to get light and larger ships were passing us by but there was no sign of any smaller craft. They must have been ordered into the lee of the 'Gooseberries' for shelter. These were old cargo ships that had been scuttled and sank to provide a harbour for smaller craft. As we drifted closer to the shore we could see ourselves heading towards these 'Gooseberries', which, eventually, we did. The crew were getting prepared to get ropes onto the ship we drifted against.

As the LCT hit against the cargo ship three or four soldiers looked down on us and then threw ropes down to the crew who then secured them. The soldiers soon attached a scrambling net to the side of the ship and we were ordered to vacate the LCT. It was still quite a gale and the swell was considerable. Our crew decided not to be hampered with our small packs scrambling up the net so we threw them over the heads of the soldiers on deck to collect them when we got on board. We struggled up the net and on looking for our small packs, we found that they had gone straight down the open holds of the cargo ship. We had started our landing in France with nothing but what we stood up in. We watched our LCT break loose after the Army Fire Service had made a vain attempt to pump the water out. Slowly the LCT drifted away and then into calmer waters of the harbour the 'Gooseberries' had created. About 890yds from the beach the LCT turned turtle and then disappeared with, I might add, the barrage balloon still flying high. Two days later we were reunited with our unit.

The following two days were taken up getting kitted out ourselves and checking up the inventories of our replacement tanks. The 'great storm' of 18/19th June also destroyed the Mulberry harbour.

The weather by now had completely changed it was now hot and cloudless skies. Our 'laager' was near a small village (St. Gabriel). We had orders to prepare for out first action in the morning.

On the morning of 26th June at 0730hrs we moved off to the start line. Our first objectives were to be the villages of Cheux and Haut du Boscq. It was raining quite heavily now as we moved off.

The formation was to be 'Two up' that is two Squadrons in front with one following. B and C Squadrons were successful in clearing their objectives and A Sqn. was ordered to go through and take the '100' contour, a high ridge overlooking both these two villages. Our first action ended with us taking our objective and then waiting for the infantry to dig in and consolidate. With this completed, we pulled by to 'forward rally' to be replenished by "B" echelon, before the Batt. 'laagered' for the night, a flame throwing tank (Crocodile) flamed all the hedges and trees round the field and 40 German soldiers gave themselves up. It had been a sobering day for all. "A" Sqn. had lost 5 tanks knocked out, 3 by mines and some of our best officers, NCO's and men in a few hours after years of intensive training.

On our first taste of action and what went off inside the tank, I was conscious of being isolated and unable to see what was going on outside. A feeling of relief comes when you look out of the periscope and see just one infantry soldier walking with you a few yards away. The three in the turret are very busy and the floor was cluttered with spent shell cases and empty BESA belts, so I busied myself with collecting these and dumping them through the disposal hatch, at the same time keeping my eyes open and dodging the rotating turret floor.

Being an independent tank Brigade (31st), we could be called upon to assist different units on various parts of the front. This meant that the Battn. would be split up in Sqns. or half Sqns. A Sqn. consists of 5 Troops and 1 HQ Troop, each troop consisting of 4 tanks. The next 4 months took us from the beaches and Cheux to Martigny. Memories of this period are vague but I recall 'Startline', marrying up, brewing up, start up, switch off, DUST BRINGS SHELLS, 240up, M&V, Compo pack, Rauray, Bretteville orchard, hedgerow, Colleville, Rivers Odon & Orne, Tilly, Bronnay, Villers Bocage, Evrecy, Hill 112, Carpiquet, Maltot, Cagny, Falaise, and Mesnay. Units we accompanied or 'married up' with were the 15th Scottish, 1st Royal Scots, 43rd Wessex Division, 4th Wilts, 5th Somersets, Durham CLI, Norfolks, Nova Scotia Highlanders, Kings Own YLI and Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

German units we came up against were 12 SS Panzer Div, 1st SS Panzer Div, 1st SS (Adolph Hitler) Div, 9th Panther Div. Also Airburst, 88mm, SP, Panther, Tiger, Achtung minen! Moaning Minnie, the difference between a Bren and a Spandau, a BESA and a Schmauzer, the stench also of the numerous dead cattle and horses that lay in the fields. There was also a distinct odour of a recently vacated German dugout, not unpleasant but very noticeable.

Sometime in mid July, during an action, our tank (Jacko) developed engine

trouble and had to drop out of the action. While waiting for the ARV to come and tow us away we made ourselves a brew, during which time, we were given about a dozen POW's to look after. We offered them tea and biscuits for which they seemed to be quite pleased to accept, they seemed to be glad to be out of it.

The ARV came and we were taken back to Brigade workshops to find that the engine of Jacko was cracked almost in half. It wasn't long before our crew then separated to replace casualties in other crews. Sgt. Owen ex 8th Army went to Hq, Dennis Goulding (Wireless Op) and Ned Sparks (Gunner) were allocated to another troop in the Squadron, Wally Knight (Driver) went to HQ Troop, and I was taken on as co-driver in 2 Troop. The troop leaders tank was named 'Jaguar' wireless op. was Harry Shepperson. The question now was "How are we going to get along with each other"? I had been with Jacko's crew for over ten months, living, sleeping and eating together. We had been through a lot and such close proximity for months on end can sometimes prove to be disastrous, even to the best of friends. It didn't take long to acquaint ourselves, we had been taken out of the line for a rest luckily and it was just the odd enemy plane that disturbed us.

My job as co-driver, (the BESA machine gun I had charge of wasn't called for too often), was to keep the rest of the crew well fed, even whilst on the move and as soon as it was possible to provide the proverbial cup of tea. This was always well appreciated not only by our crew but by anyone that was close by, such as the infantrymen who we always were glad to see. To vary our diet as much as possible we scrounged fresh food whenever we could, such as potatoes, greens, not forgetting eggs and also the odd chicken. Along the back of the Churchill tank ran the two large exhaust pipes and we placed spuds close to these and, after an hours running, lo and behold 'roast potatoes'. Lifting one of the engine back plates we could place various size tins of rice, sausages, beans, meat & vegetables etc., among the various pipes on top of the engine, before long, out they came piping hot and ready to eat. A jerry can with a small amount of water in it and a few potatoes placed inside provided us with steamed potatoes, having survived a journey on the back of the tank.

On the 18th August we were transferred from the 31st to the 34th Tank Brigade. The "B" Echelon came to join us at the harbour was Billy. This was the first time together since leaving Blackdown.

The Normandy battles were over and on the 19th August we made a 60 mile road march to Mesnay by way of Villers Bocage and Aunay, we reached our destination at 0230 hrs. One of our tanks caught fire whilst filling up with petrol. Three members of the crew were burnt but only one remained at the casualty clearing post. We all settled down for a well earned rest. T&Aing the 75mm, firing and testing the BESA and general maintenance carried out. A mobile bath unit arrived so we had much needed baths and also changes of underwear.

A film unit was also on the agenda "Tall in the Saddle" with John Wayne. Football was also welcome. Then on the 1st Sept. came orders to move in the morning. We left the harbour at Mesnay at 14:30hrs, arriving at Foret de Chaumont near Le Sap at 23:15hrs. On the 4th Sept, we moved off again passing through Grouchy and Bernay harbouring at La Boulalie near Bronney at 23.00 hrs. Leaving at 0730 hrs we proceeded

to Pont de l'Arche (Bridge No.4), crossing the River Seine at 1400 hrs. Travelling through Rouen, we passed close by the two steeples of the Cathedral which my father had talked about. Harbours at Escailles Alix near Yvetot. On the 6th Sept. we arrived at Angerville l'Orcher at 1930 hrs.

It was here we prepared for the attack on the Port of Le Havre. It was at this harbour that I had a visit from my sister's husband John Harrold (1st Batt. Leicestershire Regt.) of the 49th Polar Div. He had tried to contact me twice before, one at Cagny. We had a good chat for about 20 minutes and then exchanged farewells and 'Goodlucks'. It was shortly after our meeting that he was wounded in the assault on Le Havre.

The attack on Le Havre started with a pounding by heavy bombing and so we started weaving our way through the paths cleared by the engineers of the mine fields. We entered the outskirts of the port more or less looking down on the harbour itself and did not come under a great deal of opposition, only crowds of cheering people. They told us that the enemy had all gone down to the docks. 2&4 Troop, under the command of Capt. Sackville West, were sent to the docks. It was the last strong point to be cleared and 256 officers and men came out under a flag of truce. Our tank 'Jaguar' was then ordered to take 2 wounded German soldiers to the hospital. They were placed on the front track guards and I had to hold onto them whilst Teddy drove off as fast as he could go. We managed to deliver them safely, and then it was off back to Angerville l'Orcher for some rest.

Once again it was maintenance, films and an ENSA show, hot baths and football. Another few days and we were on the move again. At 0900hrs the Sqn. covered a distance of 54 miles passing through Gouderville, Fauville, Valliquerville, Yvetot, Yerville and Totes, arriving at the harbour Les Hameaux near Bel Mesnil. I'm afraid 'Jaguar' didn't make it to the harbour until 5 days later. We broke down at Valliquerville and stayed there on the side of the Route Nationale. It was a holiday we had never expected but I must say it was very welcome. We were close to a barn with plenty of straw which we used as our sleeping quarters. A cottage next door with a very young family and a farm house 50 yards away were glad to provide us with the normal 'oeufs' and 'lait' for the proverbial 'bully beef' cigarettes and sweets.

Two days went by and we seemed to have been forgotten by the Sqn. Two fitters eventually turned up and then left saying they would be back. Meanwhile the lady from the farmhouse had sent a note to the 'Captain of the tank Jaguar' - an invitation to an evening at the farmhouse for himself and the crew for a meal. Bill discussed this with us and he accepted the invitation, providing we arranged between the four crew the provision for one of us to be with the tank at all times. We made the arrangement for guard changing every hour. The meal turned out to be more of a banquet. We managed to cope with the language barrier for about six hours and a good time was had by all.

On the day of our departure Bill collected whatever rations we could spare including sweets and chocolate and cigarettes and presented them to the lady at the farm and the local children whom we had made great friends of.

A few tears were shed at our departure and, I must admit, not only French

tears. At Bel Mesnil all petrol was withdrawn from the Sqn. and from the 18th Sept. to the 28th Sept. we did the usual maintenance, also refresher courses on D&M, gunnery, and wireless. Drill rehearsals came next with a memorial service and then a dance held in Bacqueville Town Hall.

The 29th Sept. found us moving on again to Morenir near Abbeville, a journey of 49 miles. The route through Longueville, Envermen and Blangy, 30th Sept. St. Valery, Nouvions and on to Foret Montiers. Morning came and our route was along the Route Nationale 1, through Nempont St. Fermin, Montreul, Neuville and on to harbour at Wierre au Bois on the outskirts of Samer. 2nd Oct. Oxelaere near Cassel. It was here that we learned that our next destination would be Loon Plage just outside Dunquerque. We were to take over from the Black Watch, the 51st Highland Div, who were urgently needed in Holland. It seemed that no infantry could be spared to support us. Orders were that the enemy were just to be contained. The Regt. was to hold a position of a 2000 yd front from the sea, south of Dunquerque inland to the front occupied by a Czech regiment.

On the 6th Oct. the Sqn. leader with troop commanders were to recce the positions we were to take over from the Black Watch. All the officers stayed the night with the Black Watch in their forward positions to learn the trade. The next day the Battalion moved into Loon Plage, sheeted up most of the tanks and prepared to move to the forward positions vacated by the infantry. Our troop (2 troop) had been designated a position to the right of the Route National, which ran from Loon Plage to Dunkirk, a farm house and buildings concealed the tanks. I remember well that Teddy Jones and myself were placed at the end of the garden of the farmhouse, no slit trench, so we made the best of the hedgerow and an old four wheel trailer that had seen better days, as shelter from any inclement weather. What time it was, how long we stayed there, I don't know but I know that it was cold, very dark and the fact that the more you look at a shadow, the more you are convinced that it is moving. We did eventually get relieved for a while but the night passed very slowly and we were very glad to see dawn, back to the tanks to brew up and have something to eat.

On the other side of the main road 3 and 5 Troop had established themselves, this was Ferme Quend Coquiller. Sqn. HQ. took over two more houses to the rear. B Sqn. took over positions to our left about a mile away, between the sea and the village of Mardyck. Our right flank was held by the Czech Recce Squadron. We also had a Czech field battery in support and RHQ. We were back in Loon Plage with C Sqn. in reserve. So ended our first night as infantry. The enemy knew that something was going on and had sent up several flares at intervals. The following night the enemy got more inquisitive and sent a strong patrol out and captured our forward position at Ferme Quent Coquiller, forcing our small party out of it. It was decided that to have this German position of some strength just over the Road 'was not on' so we'll push him out.

At 0700 hrs on the 10th October 1944 history was made when 'infantry' of the RTR put in a successful attack on Ferme Quend Coquiller- 10 men from 2 and 4 Troop, 20 from Recce troop and about 30 FFI (Forces Francais d' Interieur) who had suddenly appeared at the last minute at Sqn. HQ, asking the way to the battle: 30 prisoners were

taken with several killed. We unfortunately lost Tpr. Warren killed and Tpr. Joussoit was wounded. The CO. decided to hold our regained position so the Recce troop and the FFI stayed there and dug in. 3 and 5 Troop returned to their previous positions and we, in 2 and 4 Troop, returned to our places off the road. Trip flares were placed all around and small patrols were sent out. We only had another couple of days before we were to be relieved by C Sqn. so we all hoped things would settle down and no more skirmishes. So it was on the night of the 11th that C Sqn. took over our sector and we went back to Loon Plage and our first sleep in the houses we had taken over. We were to change over every three days, one day maintenance, one day relaxing, such as trips to St. Omer and the next day prepare to go up front again. B Sqn. were having a quiet time in the dunes near Mardyck so were left to hold their sector a little longer. Before going to relieve C Sqn. our troop and tank commander Sgt. Bill Taylor was made up in the field and was now Lieutenant Bill Taylor. The change over was unhindered and this time 3 and 5 Troop took over the position previously held by 2 and 4 Troop, still with our tanks behind the buildings. 2 and 4 Troop joined the Recce and FFI element in Ferme Quend Coquillier. For the next four days and nights it rained quite heavily during which time we were reinforced with more FFI and HQ Sqn. people. The ground was absolutely sodden and the slit trenches were all filled with water, the dykes round the post were overflowing. The enemy seemed intent on retaking the post making one or two probes without success and then on the morning of the 19th, came a hefty 'stonk' on No3 Post (Ferme Quend Coquillier) and No 2 Post directly behind. Further 'stonks' came during the day and the FFI suffered 2 casualties. The Czech artillery and our 95mm replied but we were still under the occasional fire. At 2150 hrs came another heavy 'stonk' and our lookouts reported movement on our left flank by the light of two straw stacks which had been set alight by the shelling. By the amount of firing that was going on it seemed that No 2 Post was being attacked which meant that we, in No 3, would be next. The field in between these two posts were as we understood, mined, but we soon found this to be untrue. The enemy came over these fields and met opposition from our defences on the outer limits of our post. Some ran out of ammunition and were withdrawn into the central compound. Confusion abounded with the noise and buildings that were on fire. It was difficult to distinguish between friend and enemy and FFI. Suddenly it seemed it was all over, we were told to get back to HQ the best we could. Four of us with Cpl. Brownlie started back towards No 2 Post but on approaching it the four of us decided to circle No 2 as we thought there may be some enemy still there. Cpl. Brownlie went the way that he knew. We split up and the four of us started over this 'minefield', pitch black night wading through dykes and going through a hedgerow, we came upon a metalled road.

We gave a sigh of relief but there was still the question of being stopped by our own troops and the password. We made it through and reported back to our own headquarters. We were put into the line again until they were sure the enemy had withdrawn. We were then relieved and sent back to Loon Plage and some sleep. After this confrontation it was decided to hold the line with tanks, so we hid them behind buildings during the day and moved them out at dusk to the front. So, we sat in the tanks all night which was almost like sitting in a freezer for 15 hours. We soon adapted

to the situation by brewing up tea, coffee and OXO most of the night with the enormous amount of meths tablets we found in the German concrete dugouts close by. The FFI and French Marine patrols, who, throughout the night, along with our own patrols, toured our widely scattered tanks and beyond to keep in touch. In spite of these conditions we did manage a Merry Christmas and shortly afterwards one night, it was so cold that orders were given to start up engines to prevent the anti-freeze from freezing. We fired all guns at intervals to protect the buffers and the barrels from the frost.

Shortly afterwards we had the news that we were going away from Dunquerque to be converted to Crocodile frame throwers and so on the 31st January we left Loon Plage for Ardres, a small town 11 miles from Calais on the St. Omer road. "C" Sqn. Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, commanded by Major Miller, started instructing us on Crocodiles on the 2nd February. That same evening a complete Sqn. of Crocodiles (Churchill tanks plus trailers) arrived at St. Omer railway station to be off loaded and brought to Ardres the next day. We completed our training by the 10th February including a couple of "incidents" causing a little excitement. The first, when a pool by flame throwing fuel caught fire in the tank park, the other when a nameless co-driver scored a direct hit on a young lady innocently cycling down the main street of the village. Nothing more was heard of the incident after being offered the usual 200 Francs.

Between 11th and 14th February we moved into Belgium to the mining town of Waterschei, joining up with the rest of the Battalion once more under the command of Lt-Col. R. P. B. Wood. The town gave us a very warm welcome and civvy billets were offered to almost everyone which we gladly accepted. Teddy and I were billeted with two elderly people and were treated almost like their own sons. The next few weeks were spent in further training, testing the new guns at Lommel Ranges, painting new signs and receiving new lorries and equipment. On the 17th March we said goodbye to the people of Waterschei and moved up to a harbour new, Kervenheim, in readiness for the Rhine crossing.

The crossing of the Rhine started at 22:00 hrs, 23rd March and we had a front stall view of the vast number of planes, gliders and air armies that flew over. The 15th Scottish Div. and the Commando Brigade crossed over just north of Wesel. At 0500 hrs on 25th March we were awakened and moved off ready to cross the Rhine, a couple of miles north of Xanten. It was slow progress as we went across one at a time on a 50/60 raft towed by barrage balloon cables and motors. At 04:30hrs the last tank was crossing the river and by 05:40 hrs all our tanks were safely harboured in the inevitable orchard, near Bergen. While we waited for orders, the order was to replenish our stocks of scroungable supplies.

The next few days were occupied by being split into half squadrons and supporting various infantry units. We were still learning attacking with the Crocodiles and, due to the number of casualties to the supporting infantry units, we were accompanied by only units at half strength. The last days of March had been quite hectic with us marrying up with Cameron Highlanders, C.L.Y. Sharpshooters, Gordon Highlanders, H.L.I. and Rifle Brigade.

At the beginning of April we moved to the Canadian area in Holland, placed under the command of Brig. Gibson 7th Bde. 3rd Canadian Div. near Zutphen. Deventer was to be our next objective, with one half Sqn. with Canadian Scottish and the other half Sqn. with the Winnipeg Rifles. We were heavily 'stonked' moving up to the start line, Tpr. Kay being killed and Lt. Reid wounded. During the action a considerable number of POW's were taken.

We returned to harbour about midnight and were quite heavily 'stonked' but with no casualties. On the 12th April Brig. Gibson sent four of our Sqn. CO and, on behalf of all his CO's, thanked him for the Sqn's help in the battle for Deventer. Our Sqn. leader then asked modestly if they could spare a rum issue. Brig. Gibson seized his shoulder and turning to his Bde. Major said "Say, Sunray of the big burners wants rum. Fill his trailers with it." (I must say, that I can't recall having any of it!)

13th April saw us on our way back to 2nd Army Front, harboured at Lingen. This was a record run for us, 70 miles. This eclipsed our 66 mile trip in Normandy, another 40 mile trip to Holdorf and then to Bassum to harbour once more. The next few days had us moving from different areas assisting various units at Brinkum, Harpstedt, Barrien and eventually harbouring at Farenhorst to prepare for the attack on Bremen. The past week had seen plenty of fierce fighting from the enemy but by this time they showed little inclination to fight and we were finally released and harboured near Arsten, for maintenance and news that we were rejoining the Regiment at Bahlum. On 1st May we prepared to move on transporters to Luneburg, after a journey entailing having to un-ship at every class 40 bridge, we eventually finished at a small village Kirchgellersen near Luneberg on the 3rd May. The 4th May at 20:30hrs a special announcement came that hostilities in N.W. Germany were ended. I happened to be on guard duty that night and we were kept busy directing lorry loads of German prisoners away. A thanksgiving service was held in the Parish Church of Kirchgellersen.

J Garner

Dear Sir,

I noticed your letter in my local paper, the Redbridge Guardian requesting comments from ex-servicemen of WW11, and just felt I had to respond.

In 1939 I lived in East London with my parents and two brother's, one younger and one older. At the start of the Blitz in 1940 our house was damaged by bombing, but after emergency repair's was in order to live in. My father, who had volunteered in 1938 for the RAF Auxiliary Service, was called up immediately and after training found himself on a barge with barrage balloon in the Thames Estuary, being shot at by incoming German aircraft. In October 1940, my elder brother Douglas was killed by a parachute mine whilst fire watching on the roof of Woolworths Store in Stratford Broadway, E15.

I was called up in late 1942 for the Army, and after training found myself in the Royal Armoured Corp. I went overseas in December 1943 to North Africa, but the

campaign being over was quickly transferred to Italy and joined the 51st Royal Tank Regiment as a qualified wireless operator/gun loader in Churchill tanks with which we were equipped at that time. I served throughout the Italian campaign as tank crew, and as you might say, being in the thick of it most of the time. Towards the end of 1944, I received a letter from my mother to say that our house and everything in it had been destroyed by a V1 (Doodlebug). But, thank God, my mother and younger brother Duncan, apart from being shook up, were uninjured.

After VE day 1945, I was sent home in the August to join the 8th RTR, incidentally, one of the original 'Desert Rat' regiments. And in January 1946 found ourselves on a tour which took us to Austria, Italy (Trieste), then the Middle East serving in Egypt, Trans-Jordan, and Palestine, from where I was eventually demobbed. My younger brother was called up for service in 1945 and served with the RAF Regiment as an armoured car driver, mainly in Palestine and Jordan.

When I came home in 1947 my mother was still living in 'temporary' accommodation. We were never re-housed, even when my father, myself, and eventually my younger brother came home. My mother made repeated calls to the housing dept of our local council, but was always fobbed off with some excuse and eventually gave up. I wandered around not knowing what to do, I had no trade, and anyway there was very little work around. Once my gratuity money was spent I did some labouring jobs and after a couple of years finally sorted myself out.

I am not going to comment on our country today, suffice to say that I am a Christian, a patriot, and love my Queen and country, and I say to younger member's of my family, you will never, ever, know what a lovely country this was, and was it all worth it? NO.

Geoffrey Prater

Dear Mr Pringle

Read your letter today in the Independent, may I say a few words. Recently, for the first time in many years, I have felt that my late husband and father who lost their lives in the 39-45 war, would have been so devastated by what this country has become that I have felt grateful that they did not live to see it.

Myself, I was directed to war work, which many today do not understand or even care about. When my husband lost his life I was given two days off work, allotment ceased immediately, service pension to come, £1, 8s, 4d plus after some months £50 back pay, tax rebate etc.

After 30 years pension was £10 weekly. Soon after that, remarried at age 51 to an ex-serviceman (Royal Army Medical Corps) who sadly died in 2004 with cancer.

So my thoughts are - no, this country has badly let my generation down!

Sincerely
Gladys Roberts

Dear Nick Pringle

Re; your request for information about service during the Second World War in the Waveney Advertiser. I joined the RAF in 1943 as a tail gunner on Halifax Bombers, completing a tour of 32 operations, without getting myself killed. After the war, still in the RAF, I served as a motor mechanic in Austria, Italy and a short time in Iraq, then was demobbed in 1947. I enjoyed my experience as aircrew, because I had one ambition in my teen years- to become aircrew, to fly and get on opps (operational duties). I cannot say I was motivated to fight and die for King and country, that meant nothing to me, more so the adventure.

I am now 81yrs old and look back and think; war is crazy and stupid and yet, still, we are fighting and killing each other, for what? While millions of people exist at starvation level, world resources are wasted on killing and destruction. Even the death of 10 people a day on Britain's roads and numerous injuries seems to have become an acceptable sacrifice, along with all other ways we abuse our bodies and destroy ourselves before we have the chance of developing ourselves into better, wholesome human beings.

On the whole I would suggest those who died during the war would find some improvement in our British society. For example the National Health Service, the rights of ramblers and the breaking down of class structures, (although there is still a long way to go with class in Britain.) Looking at the history of humans, either in the UK or the World, it would seem we are all evolving in our various senses, especially in our spiritual ability. It could be seen as the survival of the fittest when the rest of the body has gone away.

Coming back to myself, I became a Christian after Jesus met me and turned my life upside down, opening my eyes up to new horizons, when I was 33 years of age. What I have found is there is always love and hope for the human race and there always will be; however much some humans try to destroy these values with their greed, hate and desire to hold others in their power, because love is stronger than hate.

Yours Sincerely

Doug Begbie

Sgt; Flight Sgt. 76 Squadron and later Warrant Officer

Dear Mr Pringle

I was in the W.R.N.S from 1941-1947. I miss the companionship! As we get away from the war years, sadly manners, caring, and respect have fell down and died.

Mrs A. Marks

Born 1923, writer, poet and artist

HMS Europa - Lowestoft, HMS President III - Windsor, HMS Vectis - Isle of Wight,
R.N.B - Portsmouth

Dear Nick Pringle

I am moved to respond to your appeal in the Rutland Times. Now 85, I was in tank crews from El Alamein - Tunis - Salerno - D+1 to Hamburg, the Kiel Canal and some of the 7th Armoured Division occupied Berlin. Early in Normandy I had lost all my close friends, but one of my original crew was later released at Fallingbomel P.O.W camp, having survived a P.O.W death march from the Breslau area. He lives in Australia, visited me each two years until several years ago, but we are in regular phone contact.

On release from the services I had 'the shakes' slightly for 18 months having approached the 'bomb happy' state. Each scratch and prick turned sceptic, a reaction from prolonged desert sores.

Some years later I met a young lady with the biggest smile in Christendom. My two daughters are highly competent in meaningful careers and my grandchildren, eldest a Ph.D in Genetics, second a double first at Cambridge, 15 year old granddaughter highly able academically and in the arts and an exemplary ballet dancer, her brother an ex cathedral choir boy, now playing the tenor saxophone and guitar which augers well. Dear Peggy died of a brain tumour and we celebrated her life.

There are now memorials to the Division providing a much needed focus, in Thetford Forest where we gathered on return from Italy for D-Day and at Orwell School, where we finished waterproofing our tanks and boarded tank landing craft. I have done what I had to do, but was always basically a civilian. I witnessed the demise of my friends and the carnage of civilian populations, this due to the destruction of their homes and towns, the release of hundreds of thousands of slave workers all walking east on the cessation of hostilities, the 'Displaced Persons'. Millions of civilians were killed, particularly on the Eastern Front and how many lives were otherwise devastated?

Yet it is that crass politicians still kill and mutilate civilians by act of war. Each service fatality counts, but the civilians?

The first allied act of war in Afghanistan was a high level bombing raid obliterating villages. Bombs do not differentiate between service personnel and civilians. We are not a civilised society.

Your Sincerely
R.Lay
C Sqdn, 5th R.TR

Dear Mr Pringle

Having noted your letter printed in our local Oldham Evening Chronicle, I offer the following. When World War Two was declared on September, 1939 I was thirteen years old and still at school. I left school at fourteen and started work in a handbag factory, which was known as the Lancashire Handbag Company, but there was nothing Lancashire about it, when I say that the management were all Germans. In 1941 all the Germans were interned, and the factory was taken over as a Royal Naval Stores, and I volunteered to train as a typist, and was employed in this occupation for the duration of the war.

When I was 15, I met a young man of 19 on a blind date, who was in the Army and billeted in Oldham on embarkation leave, but unfortunately we had only two weeks of friendship before he was shipped abroad. We corresponded regularly for the next three years, and, in August 1945, he was granted one months home leave. His own home town was in Liverpool, so again we could only meet for two weeks as the other two weeks were spent with his parents and at the end of his months leave he had to return to his unit in Italy. Our meeting had been short and sweet, as in that two weeks we became engaged.

My husbands name was Private Thomas Smith, and when war was declared in 1939, he was already in the Territorial Army, and one of the first to be called up. He was due to be shipped to France, but it was discovered he was too young at 17. He was then placed in the Royal Artillery as a gunner on the big guns, moving to different locations in England, protecting our shores. He was posted abroad in 1942 to the Middle East, being transferred to The Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry K.O.Y.L.I., until his last posting to Italy near the end of the war.

When war finally ended he came back to Oldham to be demobbed in early May 1946, and we then had only one month to plan our wedding for June 1946. Our first home was a one up two down, with no electricity, hot water, bath or toilet, but we did spend 53 wonderful happy years together, which in those early years was a struggle for both of us, as jobs and money were in short supply.

We later raised a family and were just so grateful that we had come through the war, yet still remembering all the long weary years of waiting. Sadly, I lost my dear husband seven years ago, but I do know that he was very concerned to see all the changes taking place over the years. He also found it very hard to adjust in Civvy Street, as he had lost 5 years of his youth fighting for his country in a foreign land, with no support at all on his return, and I know he often wondered if it had all been worthwhile.

Everyone lived in fear during World War Two, but at least we knew who our enemies were and though we had to contend with a complete blackout, bombs and doodle bugs on the Home Front, we were not afraid to venture out at night and in this respect neither my husband or I felt happy with how our country turned out, and to all my husbands late comrades, and indeed all those who fell, whether in the services or civilian life, it is my belief that they would all feel let down, hurt and disgusted to see what life is now like in 21st Century Britain, for despite all their sacrifices we are still living in fear, with innocent people being killed every day for no apparent reason.

I am now nearly 80 years old, with five of those years spent through a bitter

war, which we were told was a 'War to end all wars, with a land fit for heroes to live in' but it never happened. I now fear for my children, my grand-children and great grand-children, as in looking into the future I do not like what I see. Do you?

Yours Respectfully
Mrs E. Smith

Dear Sir

I read about your search in the local paper. I joined the Air Force in 1940, aged 20, and volunteered as an air gunner, but during my course on the Isle of Man I done more jankus than service- missing parades (oversleeping), improperly dressed, smoking in the dining room, you name it. So when a draft for overseas was named, I was on it. Leaving home on my 21st birthday I embarked on the Dominion Monarch at Liverpool, knowing our destination was the Middle East.

After 3 weeks at sea in convoy about 4am a big clash, lights went out, panic, thought it was a torpedo. However, we had collided with another ship. Unknown to me at that time a relative was on the other ship! We were in the estuary of Freetown. What a sight to see how green the forest was. We set sail again and rounded the Cape in the worst storm in 80 years. What a sight Durban was- no black out!

We spent 14 days in a tented camp and the local people were wonderful, inviting us into their homes, taking us on picnics to the Valley of a Thousand Hills, and sending goodies home to our parents, nuts and raisins.

We then embarked on a Dutch Tramp Steamer, 'The Johaan De Witt'. Landed at Port Suez on 22nd June (Barborossa) German Invasion of Russia. After another spell in a transit camp posted to 33 A.S.P (Air Stores Park) in the Western Desert doing general duties, I immediately requested to remuster as an air gunner. We were very mobile sleeping mostly in or under trucks. Corn beef and sweet potatoes our main meals. Camp was eventually set up on the escarpment overlooking Tobruk. Went into Tobruk in search of mail. 7/12/1941 (Pearl Harbour) nothing to celebrate with, a terrible cold dust storm blew for several days at Christmas.

We got caught up in the panic of retreat when Rommell made his advance into Egypt. One tarmac road only existed. A moonlit night so Jerry was very active with his air force as trucks were nose to tail. My next journey with another unit was to the Canal area and eventually across the Sinai Desert, Palestine to Beirut. I was there when I was informed to return to Egypt to train to be an A/G No.13 A.G. School alongside the Suez Canal. It was strange to see the conning tower of a submarine going along the tops of the sand dunes. From there to Castina, Palestine to an O.T.U. I was crewed up, the pilot being an Aussie training on the faithful Wellington, the only plane in my knowledge to serve the entire war.

Afterwards we were posted to Italy and after several trips I suffered an injury to my leg which required a spell in hospital. My original crew carried on to complete the tour and I rejoined another crew, again the pilot was an Aussie, but the squadron had

converted to Liberators. I was given a fighter affiliation flight, then back to ops. N Italy, France, Yugoslavia - supplies to Tito on top of all the mountains and later I was bombing mine laying in the Danube, Austria over the Alps, all the peaks covered in snow...scary.

On completion of my tour, I went to a transit house in Naples. I managed to hitch hike along the coast road to see the Isle of Capri. I flew back to Blighty in a Dakota & landed at Hendon 5 hours later, taken to Earls Court & I went AWOL for 4 days to see my wife who lived in S.E London. On demob I worked several years for a relative & then joined the largest Neon Sign Co. in the UK. We covered all the Odeon & Gaumonts in the UK. I once carried out a job in Newcastle! I also operated the scoreboard at Wimbledon on Centre & No 1 court for 14 years. I married in 1947 but a shortage of accommodation due to the bombing meant we had to live in a grotty flat. After the birth of second child in 1953, wife suffered from post natal depression.

The greatest tragedy of this country after WW2 was the placement of Clement Atlee to Prime Minister ousting Churchill. He turned his attention to restoring Germany (the Cold War). What he should have carried out was the restoration of our depleted Merchant Fleet and carried out trading with the USA & the Commonwealth who had given so many lives & aid in our epic struggle.

I feel certain that most of the 50,500+ airmen who gave their lives would have hesitated had they known what a third rate country this has become & such a nanny state. The thin end of the wedge was the abolishment of the cane at schools & the benefit system. Pregnant girls and jobs brought up by parents who do not wish to work & live so well on benefits. All the poor results is due to poor governments, the media & TV; the most corrupt being this present one that has governed us for far to long. To think that every 7th person in London is Muslim & there are more coloured in Birmingham than white is unbelievable. When I attended school the only coloured people you saw was near the docks of the large cities of the UK.

Edward Heath has made sure his name will go down in history, taking G.B into the E.U for trading only! We will be swamped with Eastern Europeans soon!

There are many incidents that happened I could fill a book, like the time at the end of the retreat I suffered a bad bout of Gyppo Gut & shared the tent with six wounded wonderful French Legion Legionaires who had just held the Germans at Bir Hakiem! On another occasion, one evening in Tel Aviv a German born Palestine WAAF (Womens Air Auxillary Force) sang the 8th Army favourite song in German, Lili Marlene to me.

I trust you will enjoy one veterans memoirs, my last posting before demob in Aug 46, was Morpeth.

Yours Sincerely
G. Young

Dear Mr Pringle

I joined the A.T.S in 1942, aged 17. I served with the RAOC, servicing and

camouflaging tanks, armoured cars etc. in preparation for D-Day. I was married in 1944 to a Royal Marine who took part in the D-Day Landings. He came home safely but suffered ill health for 20 years and died in his 60's.

I was demobbed in 1945 and lived with his parents until my husband was demobbed in 1946. My home was a semi, with all mod cons in North London. We decided we would go to my husband's home town to settle. What a shock to go from London to a little Cheshire village. We had no money to buy a house, so we lived with my in-laws. A bath in front of the fire, toilet down the bottom of the garden & everyone was a stranger. I had met 2 of his family at our wedding, but only for a couple of hours. Even my husband was a stranger really. We had only spent a couple of 48 hours leave together. I came to love them all, but it was a traumatic experience.

I found it hard to come to terms with rationing. In the army there was always 3 meals a day, even if you didn't always like it. Stretching 2oz marg & 2oz cheese over a whole week was soul destroying at first. However, one just had to cope. I find life today very chaotic, whether it's being old makes it difficult, perhaps so. I find it so annoying when tradesmen say they will ring back and they never do, or can't give an approximate time, and then not turn up at all.

There are so many things I hate in today's world. No respect for people or property. Call centres where it can be a nightmare to get the right information, being put on 'hold', listening to terrible music, sometimes for 15 mins or more. I end up shouting down the phone, 'My time is as precious as yours' then banging the phone down. Silly really because I know I've got to do it all again. These days it's a phone number or a www, not a proper address.

In 1948 we thought the National Health Service would be wonderful. Look at it now, absolutely chaotic. I was told they don't treat people over 75 for a bowel complaint- "If it gets worse see your GP". Yet people with drug problems are treated. There is no justice in this world. On the plus side, I don't pay for a T.V Licence, yet the documentaries bring the world of art, travel & animals into my home. I love being able to text my grandchildren, who find it impossible to write a letter. Next month I am starting a computer course for beginners.

So, although I hate what is happening to our country, I am so happy to be here, grumbling, but remembering better, happier days. Well Mr Pringle, I've written far too much, but perhaps something may be of use to you.

Yours Sincerely
Elsie Briscoe

Dear Nick

I'm responding to your request in the new Heyday magazine which is proving a worthy rival to Saga Magazine. Born in 1925, I ended my grammar school education in the early days of the war, volunteered for aircrew but was rejected because of my eyes (short sight in one, long in the other), an excellent arrangement a specialist told me later

(medical examinations were much more thorough on demobilisation, in case of litigation(?) than on recruitment), but in 1943 there were enough people training for air crews and so probably the conditions were set a bit higher than they had been before the Battle of Britain was over. I served as a radar mechanic (Air) which meant training in wireless and radar, then two-and-a-half years sent overseas, in Italy, until the war was over, then Palestine (an area now Israel) and Egypt before getting back to UK and having to press for what was called Class B release in order to be available at the beginning of the university term in October 1947. I managed this with only two weeks to spare.

So my initial feelings were that these four years were an interference with my career, that I would never volunteer for anything again, and that I wanted to get back to being a student. However, I was conscious that my brother four years older than me had served six years in the army. I realised that many former friends or those who became new friends had had much more dangerous occupations than I had had (one school friend died on a route march during initial training, one marvellous chap in the form above me, full of life and ready to play his part in any sport, was killed as a fighter pilot;) and I have always said that I lived in greater danger during the night of the Sheffield Blitz or on other nights fire-watching at school than I ever did when on 70 Squadron's Italian airfield where being on active service for over six months earned me the Italy Cross. And I came to realise that during those four years I was taught to drive (the corporal who taught me, who returned to life as an insurance agent and is no longer with us, said when I prepared to drive off for the first time, "Never forget you are in charge of a lethal weapon" and I wish everyone was told that), taught myself to type, was taught to swim, learned a bit of a few languages and a good deal of administration, and also learned to get along with all sorts of people.

Life in the UK is still better than anywhere else but I am sad that the ideals we aimed for in the late 40s and early 50s seem as far away as ever, both at home and abroad; the UN is pathetic and Europe a disgrace. I could go on but will just say I have enjoyed writing this. It will be useful for my own (and my grandchildren's) purposes.

All good wishes,
Ted Bell

Dear Nick

Seeing your 'piece' in the Amesbury Journal, I thought you might be interested in my experiences and views. I joined the RAF in 1942 as a flight mechanic (Engines) and when I left the RAF I was a fitter. Towards the end of 1944, I was transferred to the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm as F757754 Air Fitter Engines. Most of my early life in the RAF I was engaged on servicing of fighter aircraft and, in April 1944, I volunteered to join a SNUG unit at RAF Old Sarum as Old Sarum was on my doorstep and my home was in Salisbury. I found that we were engaged in waterproofing transport ready for the D Day landings and I was sent with a beach landing party to Normandy to de-proof

the vehicles as they came ashore. We were only there for a couple of weeks as Mulberry was installed and there was no longer any need for waterproofing.

D Evans

Dear Mr Pringle

I read your letter in our Mail, Sept 27 06. In answer to your first question, I served 6 1/2 years in the army as a lorry driver, my regiment the RASC, now named 'The Logistics Corp'. I was called up from Oxford Sept 1939, aged 22 years, and demobbed in July 1946. The longest years of my life.

I was very disappointed because I had found the utopia I had dreamed about from leaving school at the tender age of 14 years. I was earning £11 a week, living like royalty. On that fateful declaration of war I knew that the goose that laid the golden egg was dead. This country was just starting to pull up. We had passed the period of the 1926 general strike, the trade depression and poverty was rife, thousands on the dole since demobbed in WW1. Shipyards, steelworks and factories closed down.

You ask my opinion of life today in this country of ours? Today, I feel, since WW2, finished we have been disgraced by devious governments resembling the mafia. Our freedom we fought for is surely being taken from us. Devolution to split the union up, the Magna Carta, which has served us since 1215, our union flag will go next along with the currency and royalty, patriotic songs, military tournaments etc. Globalisation is being prepared. We went to war for six years to destroy National Socialism. 26 million perished and successive governments have adapted the very same administration, not by our parliament but by Brussels. I believe both Blair and Kinnock took the European oath of allegiance behind locked doors with the secret society of 'Bilderberg'. Read Europe Full Circle, also Barry Smith the New Zealander.

No sir, I did not struggle to adopt to Civvy Street, life in the labour camps prepared me for the army. Jobs were easy to get and I was always on the move if the wage was higher I was off- 47 jobs from age 14 to 69 years of age. My last job I had for 26 years and loved every minute of it, being a driver with 'British Road Services' Long journeys and nights away from base, rough at times but the substance made the job worthwhile.

I don't think much has been done for veterans apart from the usual clubs and reunions, more often than not held at the local pub. I am now in my 90th year and owing to the nature of my job I am a teetotaller, non smoker since 1947. My army life was a sort of adventure, my attitude was 'You're in it, make the best of it.'

I was single and soon adapted to the discipline, but those married ones felt the loss of the family especially with kids. Mind you, in training the humourous side was ever present. We were in Bulford on Salisbury Plain and, looking out of the windows, the snow was inches deep and we had drawn kit from the QM stores and I looked at those long woollen undies, descretion valour, I quickly took my shorts off and on with the 'Long Johns'.

We fell in ranks on parade and I, being late, was in the last three. The drill sergeant bawled out "Quick march!" and away we went. I was barely outside the gates when I felt my Long Johns slipping down and soon they were down behind my knees, pace was shorter every step taken. The squad had marched ahead and left me. I heard the drill sergeant yell 'Halt!' and he came to me, his nose touching mine and steam coming out of his ears. "Trying to desert are you soldier!" "Not likely Sir, I have forgotten to put my brace tars through the tapes that hold them up." I did a quick change and provided laughter for the Platoon. One good thing about army life, one is never alone, we're all in it together like it or not.

In the year, 1941, I had a posting from Woking, Surrey to Tonbridge in Kent. The unit was the 12th Corp school. One morning I went to breakfast and an issue of gargle fluid was given before entry to the dining area. The N.C.O in charge was allowing each man to immerse their mugs into the fluid. This method, in my opinion, was out of order and I walked by, only to be called back and ordered to gargle. I again refused and was put under close arrest in the guard room. Later I was marched to Coy office and charged with refusing to obey an order given by superior officer. The OC, Colonel Phipps, ordered punishment of 14 days which again I refused to accept.

Then I was told to gather up my kit and board a lorry which took me to Hildenborough where I was locked up in a stable, given food and a bucket of cold water which froze overnight. I had to wash and shave and parade with the guard at 6am. I was taken back to face the Colonel who asked had I changed my mind, "No Sir", I replied. I was then taken by lorry to the Royal West Kents Barracks in Maidstone where I spent 40 days awaiting court martial. I requested a medical officer for my defence, but they wouldn't let me have one. I lost my case and was sentenced to 35 days in a Naval prison in Chatham, Kent. On being released I was posted to Lancashire and now in the 79th Hy Artillery Regiment. From there to Staffordshire, where we lived in the workhouse of all places called Uttoxeter.

On Sunday morning a church parade was called and the role was called and the orderly sergeant called the fall-out the CofE, then the Catholics etc. This left two of us standing. "And may I ask what religion are you me Sergeant?" "I'm a blood and fire man." "And you?" he asked my mate. "Oh, me same as him Sergeant, Salvation Army." (Blood and fire is printed on their banner). We were told to get down to the vehicle park and don't be seen until the parade returns. "OK Sergeant."

I said to my pal Hunter Bell, a Durham lad "I know where we can get a slap up dinner." Where at?" "Rotherham." I replied. "How do we get there?" "Thumb it." I said. "Agreed." Out on the Derby Bypass 10 minutes and a CO-OP milk lorry pulled up. "Where to?" the driver asked. "Rotherham." "I'll take you as far as I can." Four miles down the road a cordon of Civil Police stopped our lorry. "Just checking your licence driver...carry on."

We were just level with No8 RTB Alfreton, when a Red Cap Provo Sergeant spotted us in the big cab and stopped the lorry. "Where are you two going?" "For our Sunday dinner." I said. "Where at?" he asked. My reply was Rotherham. "Rather a long way for your dinner, where's your pass?" "We haven't got one." "In that case drop down and have dinner with us." We were interrogated and put in the cells for three

days waiting for escorts.

We left Uttoxeter and boarded a troopship called the 'Dunata Castle' not knowing where we were heading. All we saw was ships and water, seemed like weeks. "I'll ask the next officer. Excuse me Sir, could you tell us when the ship will arrive at our destination?" "This ship?" He quipped. "You may want 3 ships to get you there, depends on the U-Boats." My mate said, "He is trying to frighten us." "And he is succeeding" I replied.

We had been caught in searchlights in the Med and the warning sounded, all troops below deck, give the gunners room for action. Seven decks down and the gunfire and depth charges. I had suddenly taken a dislike for the sea, the only action I approved of was sighted up toilets.

I started to breathe normally when day break revealed the sandy shores of Algeria, soon to land in the town of Bome(?) moving up Souk el Arba where we took over a fuel dump. From there we went to Tunis, joining up with the 8th Army, known as 'The Desert Rats'. The war finished here and we went to Algiers to board ships for 'Blighty'.

I developed Smallpox, spending 5 weeks in isolation in Bradford, followed by 21 days in convalescence in Harrogate. By my absence I lost my unit and was posted to Oxford. Leaving there for Purfleet, Essex, where I joined the 246 Petrol Company. Boarded ship and landed on 'Kings Beach' Normandy Beachhead as driver to our O.C Captain Pethwick. By a stroke of luck I had the good luck to re-join my old unit I served with in North Africa. They were in Belgium and my O.C arranged my transfer.

If variety is the spice of life, then I believe I've had my share, end of story. Hope you find this helpful in your book, use my name by all means, I am proud of what I have achieved.

Your Sincerely
G W Bainbridge

Dear Mr Pringle,

Thank goodness some-one wants to find out what people think of Britain today. I am a widow of Harry Formess, Royal Engineer killed in 'Blackpool' in Burma. One year married. My life changed forever, I married again but everything changed forever. Hope you can read this letter, but I am partially blind now.

The last straw was when the door was opened and all those foreigners were allowed in, given money, houses and cars at times. Us being told not to comment on it. Britain a land of free speech? Sheffield sounds like a foreign country ie. no one speaks English. My feeling is that men who offered their lives have been betrayed and the dead gave their lives in vain.

Most of the older people, me too, say thank goodness we are at the end of our lives. Muslims by the thousand taking our churches etc. It is no longer the Britain that was fought for.

Elsie

Dear Sir

I served in the R.A.F, May 1942 to Nov 1946, as a wireless operator in the Sicily-Italy Campaign, ending in Austria as part of occupation force. Met my future wife there and we married in 1947.

I was happy that we, the Allies, had freed Europe of the Nazi tyranny and happy to work for our country to get back onto our feet.

Until the 1970s the ups and downs were tolerable, but since then our so called politicians have, by stealth, given our country away, along with our sovereignty and self government. The sacrifices made by those who died were a waste of good people. Today I am totally disillusioned with our country and with the apathy of many British citizens. Yes I was happy in post war Britain but now feel very bitter and betrayed.

Lewis Osborne
(RAF LAC 83)

Dear Mr Pringle

I am 82 years old, married to my husband almost 60 years. He was brought up in a children's home from the age of six years, when his mother died. He went into the Royal Marines at 17 years and saw much of the war, but doesn't talk about it much, only when we hear of the killings of young people by the YOBS. National Service would do them good, send them abroad to fight.

I also lost my mother, when I was two years old, but my grandmother stepped in to stop my three brothers and I going into a home and looked after us and Dad, (her son in law). They were hard times, 'patches and darns' no disgrace as we were clean and tidy. My dad got married again when I was 11 years old and the family got split up. I was then living with a very strict aunt, as I was the youngest. My brothers had left school, working on farms, only one brother stayed with Dad. We were not allowed to speak to Dad as he shouldn't have got wed. He moved away, so I didn't see him for several years. We were innocent in those days 'not like today', but as I grew up I asked what did Dad do wrong? He had waited 9 years, why shouldn't he get married, he was still a young man? He never forgot my birthday, the only card I got. When I got married he came to see me when I had my eldest son. I was happy again. I had a family. Again my aunt tried to step in, but I didn't have to do as she ordered, my husband paid the rent.

I left school at 14 years at Easter and started work the next day. War came and my brothers were all called up, one was taken prisoner, (one didn't know where, only abroad.) The other had an illness, so back home to work on the farm, where he also

lived. I was unhappy at home, never allowed out, so had no real friends as I had to help in the house and Chapel on Saturday night and twice on Sunday.

At 17 years I volunteered for service. Unknown to my aunt, I went into munitions. Two shifts, 8am-6pm for two weeks, 8pm to 8am next two weeks. I went into private digs 5/- a week with a young couple with two children. The man was a policeman. I was made at home, one of the family, who I could talk to, have a laugh and a good joke. He was a 'Devil' always playing the fool, pity he wasn't around today, over 6ft and big, a sergeant, one of the best.

I saw much bombing, the roof of the house once, when I had been on a nights work. It made us work harder, as HE wasn't going to win, we were! At the munitions we worked in blocks, mine was B block. I think there was over 20 blocks all doing different parts. Once I was working in one of the other blocks, as I'd had Yellow Jaundice, so wasn't able to work near the oil in my block. The next week, feeling better I went back to my own block on night work. There was a raid, but we didn't stop as we were closed in. I heard when I got home 54 or 56 girls got buried alive. I had been working with them only the week before. A bomb was dropped on a school, young children were killed. We saw much bombing as the train ran down the side of our factory, as we repaired jeeps and tanks etc. and were often targeted.

I wonder now, what did we fight for? To give our young ones a good life, but are we thanked? Bring back hanging etc and out with human rights and 'do-gooders'. I had four sons and one daughter, who had a smack and only spoke once to them, were in at 10pm, not roaming the streets half the night, no tele in their bedroom, spent most of their time, evenings etc at the youth club.

What did we fight for? NOT for ***** to come into our country to tell us what we can do, in case we upset them. When in our country, abide with our rules. If we go to theirs, we have to abide to theirs. If I had my time again, would we fight as before and sing 'Land of Hope and Glory'? Old people struggle on pensions, not knowing how to make ends meet at times. People come here, get everything they ask, for free, laughing at our expense. Am I bitter? Need you ask.

Yours Truly
Mrs Cowling

Dear Sir

I have read, with interest, your article published in the Stourbridge News. This is not Dad's Army or a Fascimile.

I was exempt from the War for two years. However, I was conscripted by War Office command to appear before a board of five doctors and I was passed as 'Grade A1' for war service. I joined an assembly of strangers at an army base in Smethwick, Birmingham and we were despatched in Army trucks like cattle, for basic training in Torquay, and travelled for five hours. On our arrival we were issued with a kit bag, and army uniform and the duty officer in charge said 'If you're clothes fit you - you are

deformed!' From basic training, we were transferred from Torquay to Plymouth for training with Coast Defence and I was posted to Fort Warden, Isle of Wight for two years.

In 1944, I was posted to Dieppe. We were transferred in Army trucks and dumped in open field areas. Water was supplied with cylinder tanks, and out of bounds for troops. Rainwater was collected in shallow field areas, with large waterproof canvas sheets. We were supplied with canvas tents for one night only and a duty officer said 'If you want a shower; remove your clothes and stand out in the rain.' Little did we know that we were in a reinforcement assembly, as substitutes for troops killed in action. However, the next morning we were collected with Army trucks and I asked the truck driver - 'Where are we going?' He replied, 'You are the reserves for troops killed in action.' I asked the truck driver, 'How far away are the Germans?' He replied, 'About two miles!'

I scrambled through debris, mass destruction, rubble, over upon or around dead Germans, British forces, and British paratroops shot down, in open field areas - some landed in tree branches. I was in Holland during atrocious weather conditions, December 1944, supplies were delayed and we received Christmas lunch mid April 1945, oh yes, canned turkey from the USA with thanks. Then the Baltic coast of Germany - Wisma, May 3, 1945 - a Russian objective, when one and a half million German forces and civilians surrendered from East Berlin to the British zone in Germany. I regard myself as the most fortunate British forces member to return home from war and hell fire.

My thoughts about the country today are;- Britain today is only a memory of Great Britain and a British Empire, with a barrister, self employed Prime Minister Blair; a quisling and traitor for Britain. Indeed he should be transferred to live in Iraq. I did not return home from World War 2 for Blair to prance around the world clad as an Eastern Emperor!

The world does not change, it's the people. Greed and starvation are the divide; twixt life and demise, joy or sorrow. I have no respect for politicians with baloney for their success and self preservation. There are too many feeble minds in the need of health care. There is no law to quell child abusers, murderers or rapists. Without music, voice or sounds, the world would be a stage of emptiness all around. Indeed the answer to life, lies in the soil. Questions are never answered anymore. Live and let live.

Yours Sincerely

B Bray

ex anti tank regiment

7th Armoured Division

Desert Rats

P.S Blair has betrayed Britain and overcrowded prison cells are answer to former Labour Government, P.M, H.Wilson, when he abolished capital punishment and penal servitude, 1965.

Dear Mr Pringle

My daughter saw your request and suggested that I might be of some help in your quest for information. I think a little family background might throw a little light upon my own working life. In 1890 my grandfather moved from Thornton's Palace of Varieties, North Shields, where he was stage manager to the newly opened Moss's Empire in Newcastle. My father started as a programme boy, aged 13, in the Grand Theatre, Byker becoming assistant manager at the age of 18. He was touring manager for John Tiller and his Dancers until he was married. He settled in Glasgow as manager of the Theatre Royal. When my mother died in 1928 we moved to Edinburgh, he was then manager of the Kings Theatre, in 1930 we returned to Glasgow. At that time he was manager of the King's Theatre and general manager for Howard and Wyndham.

My one desire was to work in the theatre, doing what I had no idea. My service record; RAFVR from 18/12/39 until 22/1/46. I signed on as a wireless operator/air gunner. During most of 1940 I trained at Yatesbury as a wireless op. and in North Wales I trained as an air gunner. I was immediately sent to Uxbridge where, after a very short and rather comic interview, I was sent to Church Fenton to train as a radar navigator. I teamed up with P/O R.D Doleman in April of '41 and my last flight with him was on August 11th '43. My hope was that I would be sent on a navigation course but, alas I was sent to Ouston as an instructor on radar training. I escaped from there in March '44 and joined Ron Pickles as my pilot, staying with him until September '45 when I left as a warrant officer en route for demob.

It was the first time I was able to look for work in the theatre without my father's dislike of my hopes. On the strength of four Boy Scout "Gang Shows" and being the lead in four productions at West Malling, where I made it clear I could only play on non-operational nights, I looked for work.

It began with the odd bits and pieces and then I did a year at the Park Theatre in Glasgow, moving onto the Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow, where I stayed for ten years becoming stage director, actor and assistant producer. Whilst there I played in two TV dramas for the BBC. I was offered a three week contract with the BBC in '57 and stayed for 23 years when I retired.

I have to tell you that I was a total workaholic, as television shot upwards and I was lucky enough to go with it. I became floor manager, production assistant and director quite quickly. When our new TV Studio was built I was asked if I would like to run it and I happily agreed. As Orson Welles said when he went into his first Hollywood studio "Biggest toy train set a boy has ever had".

So it is that I had little knowledge of what was going on in the 'outside world', the result was that when I retired I found a whole new world around me. I didn't think much of it and I feel no better about it now. If anything I fear it has become rather a nasty place in which to live. I dislike the manner in which 'our leaders' make little or no attempt to serve the people, unlike Marie Antoinette they don't even suggest that we "eat cake". Despite having worked with Radar, to coin a phrase 'the cutting edge' of science at the time, I suspect computers. The good old way going to a railway station

and buying one's ticket should be brought back, once you have fallen into the trap of the computer, the worst can only happen. With deep regret I have to say that TV has slipped into a morass of muck, the lowest form of 'entertainment' appears to be the norm. I shall always maintain that I was lucky to have worked there in the golden age. I dislike phone calls to and from people in foreign parts, patience is not my forte on the phone. My daughter, incidentally, is the fourth generation of stage managers in the theatre and the second generation of floor managers in TV, swears that I must be writing the script for 'Grumpy Old Men' on TV. The lack of police on the streets must be a main cause of the general nastiness on the streets. I do fear a group of young persons wandering down the street at night towards me. All in all, I must say that I am not the happy person I used to be, I'm sure I'm OK, but save me from the rest.

All Best Wishes
Lea Ashton

Hello Nick

I saw your letter in the Market Rasen Mail, and will try and answer your questions the best I can. Yes, I was called up for duty in WWII. I was called up to the 3rd Training Battalion Royal Engineers, Newark, Notts on the 19th Feb, 1942 and that was my 21st birthday. After my training I joined the 50th Coy R.E at Brundle, near Norwich, and worked on pill boxes etc on the Norfolk coast, but only for a short while.

I was then posted to the 579 Army Field Coy R.E just outside Taunton, Somerset in September 1942. We were in bell tents and duck boards, which was far from comfortable. About a month later we moved to Bridgwater, Somerset in buildings etc. I believe we got a few days embarkation leave before Xmas and early January we boarded a train and the next stop was Greenock, Scotland, and off the train on a tender and on the troop ship 'Durban Castle' and landed at Algiers, North Africa on Jan 19th, 1943.

I must say Nick, that we had a Sgt Pringle in one platoon, which I was in, and I can see him now and he was a good artist, drawing on the walls of buildings which we occupied on our travels and we were together for the rest of the time we were out there and that was approx to Sept 1946. After the North African Campaign, we went to Tripoli and joined the 21st Beach Group and we landed at Salerno, Italy on the 9th September, 1943 and that was terrifying. As Alan Whicker said in his programme of the war in Italy, it looked very much like being another Dunkirk, but happily it wasn't, but it was far from having a drink of wine etc, which Lady Astor said it was. At the time she was in the House of Lords.

After the Italian Campaign, as part of the Land Forces Adriatic (This was all part of an Allied strategy to keep as many German troops as possible tied up in the Balkans away from the Eastern and Western Fronts. The 579 Royal Engineers were landed to carry out demolitions that would cut off Germans from linking with forces further north. The German 21st Mountain Corps were left isolated by a belt of difficult

country.), we went to Greece and then Yugoslavia, with Tito and his Partisans.

No Nick, I did not struggle when I was demobbed, for I was wanting to get back to my trade as a Bricklayer. I was demobbed approx Nov '46 and was back to work on the 2nd Dec '46. I never looked back or thought any more about WWII until after the 60th anniversary of the war. I am still a member of the South Humberside Royal Engineers Association, and earlier this year was made an honorary member, for I am the oldest member. I live on my own and I have done for twelve years, as my dear wife died in 1994.

Now Nick, it would be hard for me to think what my fallen comrades would have said, but I don't think their words could be printed.

Yours
George Sellars

Dear Mr Pringle

Re: Your letter in 'The Western Morning News'. I did not serve in the Armed Forces as such in the Second World War, but what at the time was considered a very essential service ie. The Womens Land Army, which I actually joined in August 1939 at the age of 16 1/2 years and left the Land Army in Sept 1945 to marry a farmer.

I was born in Exeter and went to school there and lived with my parents and sisters in a village just outside Exeter. My parents were both doctors with town and country practices, so the W.L.A was deemed best for me. At the height of the war there was around 80,000 girls in the W.L.A allowing young farmers and young country workers to join the services. I worked on three different dairy and mixed farms and I must say worked jolly hard and did everything a man would do. Tractors were practically non existent, so everything was done the hard way with heavy horses doing the heavy work and hand held tools doing most of the manual work, (haymaking, harvesting, etc), It is a long and interesting story.

Unfortunately the W.L.A, along with other very important civilian services were more or less forgotten by post war governments and not even represented at national occasions such as the Cenotaph or the Albert Hall on or around Nov 11th.

You ask for opinions of the country today and post war. The latter first as marriage to a farmer in Oct 45 was very hard graft for a good many years. Food in England was very short and so was money. We started off on a small rented farm with a horse and cart, about 10 cows, I think, 3 bicycles and a wheelbarrow. By the early 50's after a lot of hard work, machinery was beginning to arrive. Food rationing was still in force, so people were eager to get what farm produce there was, so gradually through the 50's things on the farms started to get better and I didn't have to adjust to 'Civvy Street' as I had never known about it.

During the last 61 years farming and us have had many ups and downs, but I have to say the 70's and 80's were good farming times and then in the 90's things started to go downhill culminating in the B.S.E, Foot and Mouth etc and all the

incredible paperwork that was to follow- equally incredible blunders.

We sold our last few sheep this past spring, old age has finally got us, which is an even worse thought. (Hard work didn't kill anyone). I cannot comment on veteran support apart from the R.A.B.I which provides accommodation and support for elderly farmers and farm workers. This country is a mess today in many ways, in education, medicine, violence and everything else. You know better than me what goes in the towns. For farmers, and especially young farmers, the outlook is bleak. I cannot understand the government attitude in not bothering about British agriculture. With all the wars going on in the rest of the world, they may well be glad to come and grovel for British produce. In this part of England (Mid & East Devon) their main aim seems to be a retirement paradise, looking after the environment (which we always have done) and more and more stupid restrictions on such things as house building for local people, doing away with essential local needs (post offices, hospitals, etc)

You probably know parts of Devon and Cornwall are still very isolated, although at last big money is being spent on roads, and possibly railways, which will bring work to the local population and hopefully more visitors to fund the improvements. But like farming where you have livestock there is always deadstock and always will be and so this part of England relies on the weather and with so called climate change who knows? I cannot say that I am happy or unhappy with the country in 2006 as so much has changed and altered in every way in the last 70 years. That if there hadn't been a Second World War and if you hadn't lived through, who knows what might have been?

Mrs B K Cork

Dear Mr Pringle

I was very interested to see your letter in the Burton Mail. I was born in Bushey, but the family moved to Lancashire where I lived until I was 21. Then I joined the Womens Timber Corp. (Formed in 1942, following the Battle of the Atlantic when timber supplies were critically low. The Ministry of Supply reformed the Womens Forestry Service that had felled timber in the First World War. Women that served in the newly formed WTC became known as 'Lumber Jills', which at it's height had 6,000 members.) I served in all places chopping trees, etc. The work was very hard, no toilets or transport to the woods, but we always had good digs so we managed to cope.

I married Gordon Astle in 1948 and have lived in Overseal for 58 years. It wasn't till I was 80 that I realised that no one had heard of the W.T.C, so for over five years, I went round the Midlands telling everyone about our work. I am pleased to say my memories are now in a number of archives and I appeared on BBC Countryfile, so I have been busy in my later life (84), As for life after we got demobbed; no gratuities or help to get jobs. I went back to work at my fathers sport shop in Bolton, my nephew runs it now.

My husband was in the RAF for 6 years as a fitter on Lancaster Bombers, which

caused him to go deaf and we had to go to court at Birmingham to get him a small pension. I worked for 8 years at an engineering firm and I saved the money to go and see my sister in Australia (15 years ago) It was wonderful. I would have like to have lived there but we were the wrong age.

As for life after the war, it was hard going and people today are lucky; good jobs, plenty of money, cars, holidays, etc.- but I don't think they're always happy. We had good comradeship in the war with little money, but we managed to enjoy ourselves. Unfortunately, my husband is in a nursing home now. He is 86, has senile dementia, also had a stroke. He can't walk, they look after him very well and I go to see him everyday.

I love singing and I was in two choirs till my husband was ill. I have booked to go and see the 'Sound of Music' in London. I don't go away whilst my husband is ill. My son will visit him. I always like to keep busy, apart from Arthritis in my knees, I love knitting, belong to two libraries, my favourite book 'Jurassic Park', play bingo, and go in all the charity shops and give what money I can. I made money with my talks and gave it all to Air Ambulance, Cancer, etc.

Wishing you all the best
Mrs Bettina Rose Astle

Dear Mr Pringle

Prior to WW2 I attended Tomnacross High School (near Inverness). My parents were crofters and wanted me to become a Chartered Accountant because of my school qualifications. However, the apprenticeship meant my parents had to pay a deposit of £100, presumably as a guarantee that I would stay with the firm for the full term of my apprenticeship. This my parents could not afford, the year being 1937 and I was 16 years old. Instead I went to the Nautical College in Greenock (The Watt Memorial College) on a grant and studied for a Certificate in Telecommunications.

In 1939 I obtained this certificate and applied to become a radio officer in the Merchant Navy. I intended ultimately to join the Post Office Telecommunications Branch. At about this time WW2 broke out so I found myself in active service straight away and had to face the perils of German U boats lurking in the North Atlantic waiting to pounce on the regular convoys of merchant ships and escorting naval vessels. From 1939 onwards I served on several vessels trading to North and South America, West Africa, the Middle East, Mediterranean and in the convoys going to North Russia, (Renowned for long sea journeys in the most arduous sub zero conditions. Bill's ship full of aviation fuel required an ice-breaker to enter the frozen harbour at Molatosk.)

I also served for 18 months in the Falkland Islands on board an oil tanker which was based in Port Stanley and was used to supply fuel oil to naval and merchant vessels in the South Atlantic. Perhaps my most hazardous experiences were when I served on a merchant vessel trading from the Tyne to London over a period of a year and was subjected to constant air attacks and also from German Eboats which were hard to

detect and lay in waiting during darkness to torpedo passing ships on the East Coast convoys. We also had to contend with deadly mines laid on the East Coast routes. During this period many ships were lost, some carrying iron ore and others aviation spirit, which meant the crews had little chance of survival. My own ship was bombed off the Tyne, but was able to limp into Blyth. Although I escaped from being on any ship which was sunk, I witnessed many of my colleagues meeting a watery grave.

I joined the telecommunications branch of the Post Office (later British Telecom) in 1946 serving first as a radio operator in radio stations throughout the UK and, subsequently, promoted to a managerial post in BT headquarters in London. I got married in 1944 whilst still on active service and my wife stayed with my in-laws until I secured work ashore. We then lived in rented accommodation and with my starting wage of only £7 a week found life very difficult. First of all I was used, for seven years, to having my food provided and served to me as well as having on the main, very good quarters. I then found myself having to bear the responsibility of providing food accommodation for myself and wife and to try to adopt to some reasonable style of life.

In those days we had no welfare support from any source. It was as though we had served our country to the full and were then forgotten. However, having come through a difficult and dangerous time at sea, we were very resilient and determined to make a go of it and many of us, including myself, succeeded. How times have changed now with the countless many clamouring to get welfare benefits for the asking. We did not really expect much once the war was over as the country was in serious debt and still living in a period of rationing and the young of today and the not so young bear a lot of gratitude to those of us who came through grim times to bring what we had hoped would bring peace and prosperity to our next generation.

Finally, may I say that the difference to us veterans over these last 60 years since the end of WW2 has been overwhelming, but although most of us now are relatively able to support and maintain a good standard of life, it has brought with it, from my perspective, an age of greed, crime and conflict and my fallen colleagues would be saddened to see the state of our country and the world in general. After all we fought and many died, including civilians, so that this country would be a better place to live in. But is it? Old people like myself, now aged 85, are afraid to go out at nights and even to answer a knock at the door. What a difference to our young days when we could play in the streets and countryside to all hours and leave our doors unlocked at night. I think the benefits we now enjoy in a modern society, whilst welcome, are eroded by the dangers faced particularly by the young and old.

These are my views.

W J Waugh

Dear Mr Pringle

Regarding your ad in the Harrow Times. I spent 2 years 5 months working down the pit, mainly on the coal face. I left without permission, then was conscripted

into the Army for another 2 years serving along the Suez Canal Zone.

In 1943 I volunteered for the Airborne, but was turned down due to my eyesight. My three siblings were already in the Army and I awaited my call up papers. However, thanks to Ernest Bevin and the wartime coalition government's policy of calling up existing miners for the forces, I was called down instead. I was sent to a training pit in Yorkshire together with other men for four weeks.

As a Londoner every aspect of the work was difficult and alien to me. Being packed into the cage lift with no headroom and dropping like a stone, a couple of hundred feet in seconds, to the pit bottom was especially frightening. After training I went to work in South Normanton Colliery in Derbyshire. The work for the first two weeks was on the surface, loading coal onto railway trucks. Then I worked on haulage, loading tubs at the conveyor belt end, under dreadful conditions. The air was filled with dust at all times, our lungs were congested and everyone used to spit constantly. Even when our shift ended, on the walk to the pit bottom, dust was churned up, choking us. The dust was two or three inches thick everywhere. I worked on haulage for six months, then I was asked if I wanted to work on the coal face. I accepted, knowing that my wages would increase in line with the regular miners, however the work was very arduous. We worked on seams for hours at a time with picks and shovels. For the first two weeks it was impossible for me to shift the same amount as the regulars. However, when the older men had finished their stint and attained their quota, they assisted me. Their humour and comradeship was second to none. I will always remember them.

When a miner was injured, a frequent occurrence, work would stop and the injured man would be placed on the conveyor belt, accompanied by a man at his feet and one at his head, until the conveyor belt ended. He would then be loaded onto an empty tub and transported to the pit bottom and so to hospital. In 1943, one in four underground workers were either killed or injured and in 1945, there were 550 deaths and over 2,000 were badly injured. Undoubtedly, most of the 48,000 Bevin Boys who were conscripted to the mines would have preferred to be in the Armed Forces, but they did not have the option. There was an alternative to going to the mines, and that was to go to prison.

Although I worked in Derbyshire I was billeted in Nottinghamshire. As there were not any pithead baths at South Normanton Colliery I had to travel back to my billet on the bus, in a filthy condition, with ordinary people who would move away from me. Obviously, this ensured a further feeling of isolation and 'otherness'. When I arrived I would strip down to my underpants and tip a huge kettle of water in a tin bath where my landlady helped to wash my back. I kept my underpants on until I reached my room and then used the cold water tap to clean my nether regions (needless to say with great difficulty!) Overall it was a very traumatic experience for a 19 year old and one which I felt unable to talk about until I joined the Bevin Boys Association and discovered the camaraderie of men who had similar experiences.

Yours Truly
D. Roland

Dear Mr Pringle

This is a response to your letter which appeared in the Walton and Hersham News and Mail. I am 82 years of age, which I guess is about par for the course for WW2 survivors. I am more than interested in your address, since I was born and spent the first 13 years of my life in Newcastle. In some respects I still think of Newcastle as my home town, even after seventy years.

My war service was from 1943 to 1946 in the Royal Air Force. In one way and another I had a pretty cushy time of it and like many others, I look back on those years as the best of my whole life. I trained as air crew as a wireless operator/wireless mechanic/air gunner. Just at the time when I might have done something dangerous, the powers that be discovered that I could speak German, so as the European war was then drawing to it's conclusion, I was shuffled over to the Fatherland to help tidy up the mess there. No heroics for me then and, by and large, I had a pretty good time of it.

On demobilisation, I would have been entitled to a place at one of our older universities, but, in a spirit of entirely misplaced altruism, I took what was called a 'Class B Release' which got me out perhaps six months earlier than I might otherwise have done in order to go back to my former job as a Post Office telephone engineer. I honestly believed that my skills, such as they were, were really needed to help get the country back on its feet and that this 'sacrifice' on my part would be appreciated. Furthermore, I had been assured by the head honchos in the Post Office that I would lose nothing in the way of seniority, privileges etc. by volunteering to serve in air-crew. This proved to be utter nonsense of course. My contemporaries who had stayed behind with their feet under the table had no intention of moving over to allow the likes of me to overtake them.

Nor did the political situation at that time offer much comfort. The first thing to upset me was the decision (made by Atlee himself) not to issue a campaign medal for the members of Bomber Command. I lost a lot of close friends and acquaintances in the bomber offensive and this bit of petty spite against men whose boots these scumbag politicians weren't fit to lick, really got my back up. Then the establishment of a welfare state, which we couldn't afford and which virtually bankrupted the country, sowed the seed of my life-long distrust and dislike of all politicians.

I haven't even mentioned the current bunch of self-serving and profligate halfwits now ruining the country I fought for. Nor the so called European Union, who have achieved by stealth and with the assistance of successive lying UK Prime Ministers, what I and my fellows of 1939-45 tried so hard to prevent.

Yours Sincerely
David Watson

Dear Sir

In 1939, when the war began, I was 20 years old. I was taken from my work in a shop and sent to work on plane propellers at De Havilland Aircraft. Overall, I enjoyed my war work at De Havilland, but my hours were long and tedious. Sometimes I worked a 70 hour week, two weeks on days and two weeks on nights. I found changing over played havoc with my digestion.

I was a voluntary ambulance worker in my spare time. I had two brothers who were sent to Burma. They returned after the war ended in good health. My brother, Harry, was an electrical engineer and draughtsman. His firm was going to make him a partner. However, going to work one wet morning on his motorcycle he skidded and went over the handlebars and died instantly. We felt he had gone through the war only to come home to die. We never felt the same again, my parents were devastated.

In those days we could go out at night on our own, and get home safely. Much different to today, where most people are afraid to venture out in the dark. I think discipline has flown out the window, because there's no deterrent, since the cane was abolished in schools, hanging banned, and no birch available. England will never recover for a long time, if ever. I feel for all the victims of murder, rape, robbery and violence and the families involved. These are my thoughts on present day Britain.

Yours Truly
Trudy Haslam (Aged 87 years)

Dear Nick

I read your letter in the Hoylake, West Kirby News. I am one of the youngest of the old soldiers from WW2. I was a front line infantryman with the 5th Battalion Seaforths in the 51st Highland Division in the last three months of the war in N.W Germany. Shortly after the war we were posted to Stalag XB, a prisoner of war camp guarding S.S prisoners. I was promoted to sergeant when I was 19 years old. Some memories of January 1945, joined the 5th Seaforths on the border of Holland and Germany;-

I sprang to attention, he turned to look at me, I heard my voice say "I would like to join A Company, Sir." The officer turned to the sergeant-major by his side, the S.M moved forward to take my name and number. The officer went on to say that we would not take part in the next attack, but when it was over we would move up to join them. After a few more friendly words we were dismissed. If that officer was the adjutant and I think he was, Captain A.D Munro, sadly he was killed in that next attack.

We started to move our equipment into our billet. I heard a voice yell "Come here you bastard!" With that friendly greeting I met up with my old mate Godfrey Morris! We briefly shook hands and grinned at each other. It was a long time since I had seen him and I didn't really know what to say. He said he would see me later and I went to dump my kit and get something to eat.

When we met later we talked of old times, our families and friends. We walked in pitch darkness, there were no lights, no moon, no stars, total blackness. I asked him if

he had any advice to give me. He said "Whenever possible keep your head down." Simple words but good advice. We shook hands, I said I would catch up with him in a few days.

The next morning they had all disappeared, gone back up the line. This time it was the start of the offensive which crossed the border from Holland into Germany. The heartland of the mighty German Army which had swept through Europe with incredible ease, then swept through Russia until they became lost in the cold vastness of that huge country.

Now the Highland Division, alongside the Canadians and other units of the British Army was fighting in the Reichwald, the German Kingdom Forest. The battle was reminiscent of the cold blooded slaughter of the First World War. The mighty German Army fought for every inch of the ground. They had men tied up in trees firing their deadly Spandau machine guns which were belt fed with a tremendous rapid rate of fire. They fought until they were killed and left hanging in the tree tops. They fought with their deadly multi-barrelled mortars and their guns firing 88mm shells with lethal air-bursts which cracked through the tree tops to spray their jagged shrapnel into the advancing troops. They fought with everything they could muster, but the British and Canadians battled their way through, with heavy casualties.

All this time we were onlookers. We had moved up into position near the heavy artillery, they were blasting out 5.5 and 7.7 heavy calibre shells. The Dutch people seemed to enjoy every minute of the bombardment. They had been told to open all their windows of their homes to prevent the glass being shattered by the blast of the guns. They never complained although it was the middle of winter.

Of the men who moved up with me I remember two. One man from Birmingham. He liked the P.I.A.T, the unpopular British anti-tank projectile, for some reason he thought it was great. He would laugh and say "I'll probably win a V.C with this, knocking out Tiger tanks." He was killed by a shell burst as soon as he arrived on the front. The other man was a Highlander, he was in his 30's. I don't remember how he came to be with us, perhaps he had been wounded, recovered and was returning to the battalion. Anyway, he was very quiet but friendly, he liked to tell jokes. We didn't know it then but he would become a war hero within about six weeks.

The battle of the Reichwald had been won, it was time for the reinforcements to move up the line to take the place of the casualties. We boarded a three ton truck. It took us along a highway which had all kinds of supplies neatly stacked along the road. It was very impressive, mile after mile, endless supplies of everything an army needs to obliterate the enemy. I was most impressed by the logistics in setting up such a vast array of materials.

The trucks moved up into a forest area, the road became narrow, we moved at a slow pace. I was conscious of the fact that every yard of this journey through the pine trees had been won in the past 72 hours with heavy losses. We eventually rolled to a halt and were told to get out the truck. We had a fair amount of equipment and as I jumped down I stumbled a bit on the uneven ground, but I held onto the truck with my left hand. I pulled myself upright as I swung around the side of the vehicle. Before me lay what seemed to be an endless line stretching across the forest floor. Still figures

neatly wrapped in army blankets, boots protruding out of the ends, some British, some Canadian, some German. The dead lay side by side, all neat and tidy. I pulled the rest of my equipment from the truck.

All the reinforcements that I was with were joining 'D' Company, who had led the attack and suffered heavy casualties, I was joining 'A' Company. I was told to leave all my heavy equipment, given three blankets and directed to 'A' Company lines. Looking back I am amazed at the way the Army kept its promises, I was one man in millions, but they kept their promises down to the last detail.

The front line had moved forward so the men were relaxed, resting, some were sitting around fires, their faces all had the same look about them, as if they were standing in a shadow, their faces dark with black circles around the eyes. I made my way through the trees which were well spaced out, a carpet of brown pine needles covered the forest floor. There was a strange beauty about the place. I felt as if we were on another plain! Warriors on a battlefield, the distant roar of the gun-fire, the sound of shells passing overhead, the gentle uplift of smoke from the fires drifting through the trees.

As I passed one group, a squaddie threw some petrol from a bowl onto some charred ashes which seemed to be dead. In an instant the petrol ignited, he jumped back. As he did so the petrol and the flames covered the front of his battle-dress. He fell to the ground and tried to extinguish the flames. Without thinking I jumped on top of him covering the flames with the blankets I was carrying, the fire was extinguished.

In the late 1950's my wife and I lived in Canada. I remember talking to an old soldier who had been in the Canadian Army, at some stage he was taken prisoner. When he returned home at the end of the war he was given full back pay for all the time he was a prisoner, rehabilitation pay and demobilisation pay. He bought a new house for a low price and paid for it in easy stages. As Toronto spread out over the years his house was in the way of the main Yong Street being lengthened. He was paid over \$1,000,000 and moved to another nice house. That is how the Canadian Government treated it's veterans.

Of course the British Treasury was almost bankrupt, so we got almost nothing, if I remember rightly I got £30. I had no trade. I finished up going to work in London, which I hated, everything was so dreary. My mind was affected by the war, everything was so boring. I became a gambler and spent all my money on dog racing. I had a stomach ulcer, a legacy of war which many people suffered.

By 1950, I was determined to leave London and return to Merseyside. Eventually, I met my future wife, stopped gambling and got married. We emigrated to Canada, but my young wife got homesick for her family, so after three years we returned to Britain. In 1961 I started a mail order business selling to firms throughout the country, with my brother Eric, which became a thriving business.

The changes in Britain since the war are unbelievable! I have got very definite views on that subject, the enclosed newspaper cutting puts it in a nutshell. (The cutting is from a letters page, which points out that it was Gideon Ben-Tovim of the Labour Party who, in 1946, was responsible for the British Nationality Act which 'opened the door to Third World immigrants', pointing out that the British people were 'never

asked or consulted' and that 'It follows that Labour officials will not take kindly to those who do not embrace the wonderful multi-racial society that the Labour Party have created for us.')

Sincerely
Al Capleton

Dear Mr Pringle

I saw your story in our local paper, Andover Advertiser. I am now aged 83 and disabled. My home was on the Isle of Wight, at Haylands, on the edge of Ryde. In June 1940 I was 17 years of age. I cycled to Cowes, I.O.W, to enlist in the Army. I told them I was 18, had a short medical and was given 6 Shillings, three days pay. I had joined the 8th Btn The Hampshire Regiment, in Nov 1940. I was posted to a young soldiers battalion.

In 1942 I applied for the Parachute Regiment. I was accepted, did my training and was posted to a Parachute Battalion. I served with them in N. Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany, Greece, then Palestine. I served from 1942-1949. I got made Sergeant and left them in 1949.

My thoughts were mainly relief that I had survived, and gratitude for the marvellous comradeship, courage and spirit of my comrades. I remember vividly the faces of those that did not come back, some in particular that I knew well, and just hoped that their sacrifice would not be in vain. All were volunteers, and having been taken on, never shirked. The greatest disgrace was to let your comrades down, so although frightened or terrified at times, you pressed on. I fought for a green and pleasant land, and freedom. I gave the war everything except my life. Would I do it again, the answer is NO!

My free speech is gone. They tell me I live in a multi-culture society, I do not remember voting for this. There was no support for veterans until two years ago, by then 70% were dead. Did my young comrades die to live in a society as we do now? Will our Muslim brothers fight for us? Sadly the country I grew up in and fought for is no more, we are a third rate nation.

Post war enthusiasm for soldiers does not long survive the victory parades. The way in which society has treated the men who fought for them has often been a little short of shameful. Most soldiers remember war with mixed feelings, aware that it has altered the way they looked at the World.

Battle is a watershed, even in the lives of those who survive it without visible scars. Military training, the forging of bonds of comradeship, the traumatic events of the battlefield itself are never entirely forgotten. By some they are frequently and freshly remembered, and by others they are locked away like an album of horrible photographs, and are viewed with pain and reluctance. Indeed a few of the images may be so hideous they are exorcised altogether.

T. Toogood

Dear Nick

During the European war, I operated over Germany navigating the Lancaster Bomber in Bomber Command. When the war finished we dropped food to the starving Dutch people, brought home our prisoners of war from Brussels, then for several months ferried personnel to and from Italy.

We were then posted to a Coastal Command station and on the 22 December 1945, with the rest of the crew, I was sent to Egypt. Goodness knows why, just then, as there was no urgency. There was a rumour that Bomber Harris had issued an order that all crews who had operated were to be sent home for Christmas. After a period of about 6 months patrolling the Middle East, flying ceased. We were then given various ground duties. As a warrant officer I was mainly concerned in various admin posts, sports secretary, operation control and records security. This allowed plenty of time for sailing, tennis and generally making the most of the excellent climate. The food was good and plentiful and of course there was a good time with the lads, three of the original crew still being together.

In November I sailed to Liverpool and a few days later arrived home after an absence of almost a year. It was good at first to be with the family and my girlfriend, but then it became boring. The weather was cold. I took my ration book to the local shop and the weeks ration hardly filled my jacket pocket. All my old friends seemed to have disappeared. To go to a dance meant walking several miles home. I felt I was in a strange land. Worst of all my immediate family didn't seem to realise that I wasn't the raw lad that had left home 4 years ago but a man that experienced danger, had visited 16 countries, exercised responsibility for six other crew members and became a very mature person.

I first of all applied for a degree course but because I had been in a reserved occupation I was refused. The previous year I had asked my boss to apply for my release under the class B scheme for desperately needed craftsmen but he refused. He considered that as it had been my choice, to leave it was his choice to say when I could come back. However, as soon as he knew I was home he told my father that he needed me straight away. Being young and cocky I decided I would return when it suited me. I signed on at technical college for four nights and two days and made myself study really hard. Then on the first week of January, I returned to the old firm. I soon realised that no one was interested in what I had done, the war was over and it was history. It remained so for nearly 30 years, then the squadron reunions began and the crew were once again together every year.

It was ironic that the day I started work the snow came and, being the youngest and fittest, I was the one who had to climb up the poles and replace telephone lines and power cables. Like many others I won't forget the winter of 1947, it continued for several months. In due course I obtained the qualification for an electrical engineer and began my professional career.

My experience of coming home wasn't too bad; I was able to work myself back to normal, but for those who hadn't a job to go to it was hard. I now give talks about Bomber Command and most listeners are amazed to hear the truth instead of the general perception that we were only interested in killing civilians. When I explain that had we not destroyed the U boat shipyards the enemy could have blockaded the British Isles or that had we not destroyed the huge guns on the French coast the invasion would have been a disaster. The general public know so little about the war. Some teachers tell me that it isn't taught and are unable to invite me to tell children what we did. When I told one man that I was a navigator he said "Oh was that in Spitfires"!!

There now seems to be a general 'dumbing down' which is in my view due to the media. Swearing, sex and violence with a lesson in crime every night is the norm. Normal family life will soon be obsolete in favour of gay marriages, etc. It's a pity that all our modern benefits are gradually eroding our standards.

Your Truly
C.C Souter

Dear Mr Pringle

As an ex-service woman I felt I must reply to your letter in the Stourbridge News. I just had to write to say that I think the most shocking thing in today's world is the lack of good manners.

During the war years and in the blackout there was no fear while out alone. How different now. We were very hard up during those years, but there was great comradeship. Now I feel there is more money than sense.

Anon

Dear Sir,

I am appalled at what has happened to our country. I don't remember having a referendum as to whether we wanted to become a multi racial society, and never heard it mentioned during the war. If you walk into town, every other person is coloured and many of the whites talk an alien language. We not only feel betrayed, but feel that all our friends and loved ones, who died for our way of life have also been betrayed. We get our 'heritage' programmes on the tele while it soon will not exist. Perhaps that is why some of our problem youngsters are so bloody minded, they know their future is compromised.

As for the wars, my dad served in the 14-18 war as an infantry man, was missing for a time when wounded, but got through it with the Royal Berks Regt. My brother, the eldest, Albert John Owen Archer, was reported missing over Berlin 30th Jan 1944, ten days after he was married. He was serving with 207 Squadron at Spilsby, Lincs as a wireless operator/air gunner, the last op of a series I believe. Years later I found the pilots grave, photographed it and managed to contact his sister, but no trace of the rest

of the crew.

I was called up 18th Feb 43 and was in Normandy in June 44 as a signaller in the Royal Artillery with the 61st Field Regt RA, 59th Infantry Division. We had some dodgy times, but the worst pill we had to swallow was, with other units as well, being bombed by the Yanks before the line up at Falais. After Normandy our Div, 59th, was broken up except for the guns who became the 59th Army Group RA. As an AGRA we were switched to where ever they needed us, supporting British, Yankee Airborne or the Canadians. Towards the end of the war, our Regt was chosen to convert to Super Heavy, so instead of twenty four 25 pounders we had six American guns, roughly 8-10 inch, capable of firing a 500lb shell about 20 miles. We were further back, but never seemed quite the same. Ended up near Emden with the Canadians.

After the war it was mostly guard duties on a prison camp, then a displaced persons camp. I wasn't sorry when I joined a mobile brigade which we thought was going to Palestine, but ended up in Trieste. The train journey from Germany, wooden seats and no lights, was very long winded. We were in a camp, 1,000 ft up on the Yugoslav border, Nissan huts held down with steel wires and no heating. The winter of 46-47 was severe and we had to suffer the wind, known as the Bora. It never let up and, at one stage, any water we had was given to the cook-house so we were unable to wash or shave for a couple of weeks. All good things come to an end, and later we were on a camp between Riccioni and Rimini where a lot of Ukranians were being sorted having joined the German Army. I got demobbed from there about July 47 and was directed back to an out station job on the railway. I had to swap around but spent all my time either with the Railway or Plessey Sheet Metal. Never got rich and never married as I didn't fancy adding to the next lot of gunfodder. Cynical old bleeder!

Good Luck
D.R Archer

Dear Mr Pringle

In answer to your letter in the News and Mail asking for wartime experiences and opinions on the state of our country etc.

I was serving in the Royal Navy when the war was declared on HMS Argus, our oldest then aircraft carrier, converted to an aircraft carrier from a liner whilst under construction. We were sent to Toulouse, South of France as a training carrier for pilots. When France capitulated we were sent to Reykjavik, Iceland, with a consignment of amphibious planes. All Iceland people were pro Nazi and let us know it in no uncertain way. We had the misfortune to run aground and suffered some damage in getting refloated.

Back to Scotland, quick repair, then to the Med to supply Malta with planes. On return to England was drafted to convoy duties. Our job was to protect our convoy from mines, moored mines, floating mines, magnetic mines and acoustic mines, U Boats, E Boats, and enemy air attacks. In war, as in undeclared war ie. terrorist attacks,

mistakes are made. On one occasion we were sent into action against our own MTBs. We left from Shoreham for D-Day Landings. We were very lucky. "We" did not have to land!

Having a trade I did not find any difficulty in finding work. We were given civilian clothes and a few quid.

You asked has there been enough support for veterans? My answer to that is: every year we hold a day of remembrance saying "We will remember them!" What we need to remember is, what they died for ie. the survival of our British nation and a return to civilisation, that we are giving away to the rest of the world including the EU. That it was the USA 'Marshall Aid' that rebuilt Germany and gave back France their country! They have never forgiven the USA for giving them back their independence!

Most of our politicians are not old enough to have experienced the way in which our country has degenerated over the past 60 years and have no concern about it. They refuse to acknowledge the fact that the countries of the British Empire, having been given independence that they wanted, having got rid of us, all want to come to Britain. We can no longer get a census of the number of people in our country. We don't know how many foreign people we have in our country illegally! Where they are! Where they are working! or are claiming benefits having never contributed to the state! Over population has been the cause of most of today's problems. Our prisons are full, a great number of them prisoners being foreign. We have tribal wars between the different races that have joined us! Housing shortages, that our government bodies blame onto people living longer.

Immigration, like law and order, is out of control. We have everyday gun and knife crimes, rape, muggings, etc, etc. etc. and we are told we must keep up with the times. Are the times worth keeping up with?

Our laws are broken with impunity by all except the ordinary British people and Muslims can demonstrate with police protection about anything not in keeping with their Islamic faith. We have health problems, sewage problems, water problems, refuse problems, etc all due to over population and all our MP's pander to immigrants for their votes. All our troops are being killed fighting to give Muslim countries the democracy that they do not want, it being against faith! British people have lost their freedom of speech and we claim to be living in a democracy where everyone has a voice in the governing of our country! This is rubbish! Since all our concerns are ignored!

What do I think about the state of our once green and pleasant land? I'll tell you, we have become the cesspit of the world with the recreation of the slums that we had rid ourselves of. T.B and other diseases have been brought into our country and our governing bodies blame it onto people going abroad on holiday. We are building bigger airports to enable asylum seekers to go home on holiday!

Age 95 years. service; Royal Navy. Rank C.P.O

Bill Dallamore

Dear Mr Pringle

I was born in 1918 near Buckingham Palace, my work started in the West End of London, I was 14 years old. When the war started our house was destroyed. I moved to the Isle of Wight, after 1 year I was called up into the air force until the end of the war.

Lilian Hughes

Dear Mr Pringle

I have read your letter in the Surrey Herald. I am 89 years old and my writing is not so good, so I will just give you some observations. Life since the end of the war has definitely deteriorated. Before and during the war everyone was kind and friendly.

After surviving the bombs in London, I moved to Hampton in Middlesex. I travelled about London, tube and train and walked from Hampton station to my home. No street lights, only a torch. Recently a woman only in the next street was murdered between the bus stop and home.

Do you think the reason so many people are living to 90, or even 100, is due to 6 years healthy living from 1939-1945. The rations gave us a little of the essentials and we made it up with fruit and veg (home grown). No time to get fat too busy working.

I don't think there were muggings and drug addicts. What is the percentage of ***** immigrants in our prisons? The economy is in pieces, millionaire sports people and no money for hospitals. People say they cannot afford a house, but do they give up all pleasures to save for it? We did! Why Iraq war when we are only making it worse?

I did not serve in the armed forces. I worked in a boatyard at Hampton. I'm disgusted with my writing. Sorry!

Yours
Marjorie

Dear Nick,

I joined the A.T.S. in 1942 at the age of 17. I worked as a clerk typist at H.Q. London District at Leconfield House, Mayfair, London. I lived at what was - and is now again - the College of Organists in Kensington. We had our parades - taken by a male sergeant major in front of the Albert Hall! Leconfield House was bombed while I was working there and we lost the top floor with several of my mates. I was thrown to the floor and was stunned for a few minutes. I came round to find an officer shouting at me "Get up Dempsey, don't you know there is a war on?!!" No soft words and psychology in those days!

We were, of course, very much aware of the guns in Hyde Park whether at work in Mayfair or back at our quarters in Queen Alexandra House. The fact that we were bombed every night made no difference at all to our parades and our work at Leconfield. We marched through Hyde Park every morning without fail. As the officer said (often), there was a war on!! Albert Hall though was rather more thoughtful - we

had free tickets to their concerts!

I was also sent to a unit - also in the London area - where maps were printed for the military. The idea was that we in the ATS would take over from the soldiers who would then be freed for active service! The men didn't like the idea at all! They were in cushy jobs and, despite the bombing, they hoped to see out the war there. So they didn't - as they were supposed to - teach us how to do their jobs. Fed up of just making tea, I complained to senior officers. We were then taught the job although in a somewhat chilly atmosphere!!

When I returned to Civvy Street, I had applied to go for teacher training. There was an emergency scheme especially for ex-service people after the war to replace teachers who had been killed or who left to do war work. Serving teachers did not like the scheme as they had trained for three or four years and the emergency scheme was only one year! However, it was a tough year and I finally emerged as a fully fledged teacher! After some years, I went to Oxford to gain a diploma for teaching deaf children. This I did, until I retired.

I married and had three children. My husband is now dead and I care for my youngest child - a boy - who has severe learning difficulties.

Yours sincerely,
Eileen Langman

Dear Mr Pringle

My Royal Navy days started Jan 39. After overnight sleep at the Salvation Hostel, God, I felt afraid, sleep hopeless my mind going over & over have I done right? Collected the next night, quite a few of us like sheep, then another medical, "yes you're ok" & herded to some railway station, where? - no idea, cold, tired and hungry, we were from all walks of life; cities and towns. We arrived Sheerness like cattle onto covered lorries. 5 mins on... darkness, a huge wall. Entrance our abode until training ends. HMS Wildfire -off the lorries, small green doorway, a waiting RM. What a lot we looked, names shouted, sign here, not told what for then herded into a dining area. Three long tables, wood seating, our nosh pies and peas and tea. So from 31 Jan 39 to 21 Aug 39 training and discipline. We soon learnt modesty, showers etc, gone own washing.

We all split up & to various ports. I to Portsmouth, to HMS Hawkins, brief back infection. War declared, back to HMS Victory, to HMS Frobisher. Drafted to HMS Dawe? China Station covering Singapore, Samatra, Java etc Islands, Ceylon & Bombay. We saw the scuttled German cruiser WW1 Emden, also picked to go by whaler rowing boat (pointed both ends) onto some island. Jap activity, barrels of oil diesel. Our job, take blacksmith with a large pointed sledge hammer to bust these drums. Cool breeze, yet I was sweating cobs, phew! I wasn't all that old - boy seaman.

Left Java to train in magnet mine sweeping up to Singapores surrender. Both sweepers HMS Circe mine & Bill Madusa at City Dock. One or two white dockyard

officials and my shoes had it. Went in a shed (Godowns), Yes! a pair of shoes size 7 ok, got to sign here to pay for them & bloody Jap on door step sniping us few RN & soldiers on jetty. The army blew causeway up, a child could have walked across, useless, didn't stop Japs.

I wanted to get to my old ship Circe. City Dock, it was chaotic with thieving. A Chinese family dragging a new mattress through the dockyard gates, no one to stop them. I saw a lorry, a fellow sat in. I'd never driven but going to try as damn Japs too close. Opened door, fellows head rolled off, full of maggots, they'd bred. I saw, during a raid, men and women running from an elite white club, Raffles, night dresses etc, fellows in pants. Reached City Dock and escaped to Aussie.

Returned east after leave to join HMS Redoubt R Class Destroyer, really happy ship. After surrender of Japs, I had to rig lights up from stem to Stern to sail into Penang. I qualified as leading Seaman & permanent P.O. I've forgot to mention before Redoubt, a spell on HMS Vega, North Sea patrols of Western Approaches, Liverpool. I had severe Tonsillitis and had to leave her for an operation. Hope this is OK, I'm 85 getting things into perspective taxes the old grey matter! I was 62 years wed & nursed my wife for 12 years- Leukaemia, I miss her.

Out the Common Market and oust all the so called asylum seeker scroungers. If we did a quarter of what they do here we'd be in jail or deported. Not here- human rights, only making money for solicitors etc. Bring back cat and birch and hanging. Then us war years pensioners may feel safe to go out in dark hours. Stop scroungers coming over and getting free treatment on the NHS. Go to their country and we pay up. These idiots Greenpeace and animal groups, only trouble-makers. Prisons - TV's out, bare meals, and gym etc. out. Prison should mean prison. Through this dam Government - immigration soaring, murders, muggings, even Muslim no-go areas. What next in 20 years? All white decent have emigrated, If I was younger I would. So by and large New Labour have made a mess of this country. Six year I fought for this country. If I was call up age now I'd refuse.

Sincerely

Name withheld

War Medal, Atlantic, Pacific (Burma Rosette) Star.

Age 85 1/2 R.N Petty Officer L.T.O 1939-46

Dear Nick

Having read your enquiry for information from members of the forces I thought I could be of use to you. My particulars are - Joined September 1938 H.M.S Ganges boys training establishment (HMS Ganges was opened in 1905 as a shore based facility and closed in 1976. During this time it trained thousands of young sailors for Royal Naval service. It was famed for its strict discipline and for the 143ft 10in mast erected on the parade ground. On finishing the intensive training the sailors would put on a display, climbing the mast without any harness or safety helmets. The masts would be full of sailors and the heroic sailor who volunteered for the job of going right up to the top,

shimming up the mast and standing to attention on the 11in top circular platform would be known as the 'Button Boy' and for his efforts receive one shilling!) and then joined HMS Caledon October 1939 (HMS Caledon was built in 1916 and was at the WW1 Battle of Heligoland Bight, where one of its crew, John Henry Carless, was posthumously awarded a Victoria Cross for engaging the enemy while mortally wounded. In WW2 she was at first part of the Home Fleet where she escorted convoys and was involved in the pursuit of the Sharnhorst and Gneisenau, two German Battle Cruisers, after the sinking of HMS Rawalpindi. After this, the ship was re-assigned to the Eastern Fleet.) After three years returned to England, joined H.M.S Rocket 1943 (HMS Rocket was commissioned in August 1943 and was soon in the thick of action. On October 21st, as part of Operation Tunnel which was attempting to stop the Munsterland, a blockade runner along with HMS Charybdis, Grenville, Limbourne, Talybont, Wensleydale and Stevenstone she encountered escorting German torpedo boats in the English Channel, off the coast of Brittany. HMS Charybdis and HMS Limbourne were hit. 500 souls lost their lives as Charybdis went down, followed by Limbourne after it was scuttled by HMS Rocket after survivors were picked up. HMS Rocket later sailed to the East and participated in the shelling of Sabang in 1944 and the Andaman Islands in 1945), returned home on a troopship 1945 now as a P.O director layer. Returns to Ganges as instructor until 1947 Sept. Purchased my discharge and have done nothing else but fight Government and Local Authorities to get satisfaction.

GH Bishop

Mr N Pringle

I volunteered for the RAF in October 1939. From 17yrs to 20 I was training as a draughtsman in a building office & night schooling 3 nights per week for 8 months of each year. I applied for pilot or navigator and waited 7 months for the board but failed the eye test by a narrow margin. The firm I worked for ceased to exist in 1942, the owner going to prison for a war damage big fraud. I was put on anti aircraft guns. Mentioned in Despatches in Sept 1941 when a sergeant. For 5 years I was in the RAF Regiment, the last 2 years in the 2nd Tactical Mobile Air Force. From liberated Belgium we drove through defeated Germany to get to Denmark before the Russians.

Since those days my wife and I had 3 holidays in Denmark & saw my many friends, some have had holidays here in Formby with us. We also had holidays in Norway and Sweden. My feelings are that these 3 countries are the most democratic countries in the world & are more advanced than the British & Americans.

Thanks to the RAF Education Office at the best airfield in Germany Nov 1945, I was briefed on training courses for public health inspectors (a great shortage). I was seeking a job that would not pin me to the desk or drawing board. Interview at the Ministry of Health Jan 1946 & accepted. Course at the Liverpool University School of Hygiene. All of us 26 mature students, one aged 46 years, turned out to be from 1 of the 3 services, all ranks from private to captain.

I worked for the following corporations :- Manchester, Birkenhead, Bottle & Southport the longest. I retired as a Divisional Inspector 3rd in command. A long period in public service gave me great satisfaction. I specialised in housing improvement grants, slum clearance & re-housing. I had 600 houses brought up to modern housing laws and many demolished at Southport. I had settled smoothly into my new life.

At 87 years, in October just gone, I still do 3 to 4 mile walks on miles of beaches & high sand hills. I cycle locally up to about 6 miles. My wife died in July 2005, I live alone now. My daughter, her husband & 2 children live near Derby. She phones me 3 times per week & they come for the day about once per month & come for Christmas & 2 x in the summer for a weeks break. I cannot cope with motorway driving & only drive within 15 miles of home. The high speed & aggressive driving troubles me. I learned to drive in an armoured car in 1940. All RAF vehicles were governed to save petrol ie. they could not exceed 40-45mph, this was then removed when we went to the Continent.

My view of the last 15 years is that the change is bad. Far more boozing, much worse degrees of violence, road anger & hate & high speeds, too many people under 50 badly overweight, round shouldered and a strain upon the health service. I think National Service should be 1 active year, a choice given to do at 18 or be deferred after university training, etc completed.

I have been a scout leader at our church for 13 years & received the Chief Scouts award for 'Good Service' & finished as an instructor because one had to hand in your warrant at 65 years. Taught many scouts, sailing, canoeing, hiking at annual camps & the elder boys on the Mersey Estuary. I sold my sailing dinghy in 2004 & crew from time to time in certain yachts. I have sailed for 60 years & was made a life member some years ago. This month I will be at the annual service of remembrance at the local C of E church & another short one for those killed from my old school, Waterloo & Crosby Grammar School. 59 boys were killed, 37 of these were at the school when I was there.

One of my sorrows was the pension scheme for disabled ex servicemen. I do not know if its better now. My father was mustard gassed in 1917 & was in hospital for 1 year & received a full pension. This was stopped in 1919. The British Legion fought but failed. My younger brother was part disabled 6 weeks after landing on D-day. He received 10/- per week, this was stopped after 1 year.

Our brothers and sisters in the Armed Forces of Canada, Australia & New Zealand received about 2x our pensions & also their pay was about 2x ours. I discovered that once the new Germany was running well it made pension payments in excess of ours. Makes one think about politicians.

I have been favoured with a long life & missed death twice by sheer luck in 1940/41. I still hope our country will improve. Life is strange. If I had got what I wanted in 1940 to be aircrew I doubt if I would have lived more than 2 years. Except for the Hurricane and Spitfire, all our other aircraft 1940-42 were inferior to those of the Luftwaffe and heavily outnumbered. Most of my schoolfriends died in Bomber Command as aircrew.

My number was 970,263 final rank flight sergeant. My younger brother Stan was in the D-Day landings at 18yrs 7months. Of his company only he & 6 others survived. He died 4 years ago & lived at Ulverston in the Lakes. I hope my scribble will

help you, please omit my name.

Name Withheld

Hello N Pringle

I joined 240 Squadron at Lough Erne in September 1941, an experienced WOP/AG, and on one of my first convoy escorts left before daybreak, spot on thanks to our excellent navigator, Eric Rockcliffe. Reported to the Naval escort by Aldis lamp, started to circle and spotted a very large 4-engined Fokker-Wolff, went to wave top level, our pilot F/Lt Sumner was immediately on the ball. Second Pilot Bert Kellog, Australian, was bouncing up and down on his seat, and started to close. The F-W turned and fled, disappearing in the general direction of some part of Occupied Europe.

We left at last light at our usual cruising height of 2,000 feet and encountered a most violent electric storm. Direction finding was impossible, we headed we hoped to the east. At one point we were caught in an up draught, lifted to 15,000 feet and dropped with a bump, springing as we found later a few rivets in the hull.

Suddenly I spotted the unmistakable radar return of Ailsa Craig, our homing exercises from RAF Prestwich. We were heading for the north of Scotland. We touched down at Stranraer, plugged a few holes, decided we had fuel to get us home and pointed the nose to Lough Erne. We'd been in the air for 24 hours. During all my trips I saw no sinkings and only one hostile aircraft. I'm sure I flew in the same Catalina for every trip. We left for Redhills, Madras, in June 1942.

Yours

Arthur Escott

(Member of the Indian Ocean Flying Boat Association)

Dear Nick

As a regular writer to all the West Country papers, including the Mid Devon Gazette were I saw your request for opinions of after the Second World War.

Just after the war people had a great struggle to survive, money was scarce and jobs were hard to find, with very low wages, but apart from all that people were more friendly to each other and neighbours went to each others homes. To marry in 1939 as I got married, one expected to be called up any day. I got called up 20th June 1940 to join the Devon Regiment.

Today I find neighbours don't like to be friendly, as it is now all employed people from away. Youngsters over indulge in drink and end up in hospital, at a great cost to the decent public and the young and elderly have to wait to get treatment. Everyone is on credit and all owe companies money. Parents do not control their young ones. Today, they have little exercise, all are overweight.

Give me the old times. Getting on 92 years of age and unable to walk through an accident, but have an active brain.

(In Oct 2008, two years after this letter aged 94, Mr Lee got national media attention when he complained to the local pub meals on wheels service that his 'peas were like bullets' and was banned from receiving further meals and also from the pub for complaining about the food. The story was featured in amongst others the Telegraph, the Mirror and Metro newspapers!)

Yours Sincerely

Stan Lee

Ex/Cpl 8th Batt - Devon Regiment

Ex/ Special Constable - Police

Dear Mr Nick Pringle

I read your request letter in our local paper 'The Caernarfon and Denbighshire Herald' 'Veterans Views'

I am 85 years old, a D Day veteran of the above S.W.B 2nd Battalion (The only Welsh regiment to land on D Day) at Le Hamel on Gold Beach about 3-4 miles up the coast from Arromanches. If you are looking for a spell in the klink with me you would write up every word I give you.

With other silly Welsh Buggers I landed on Gold Beach at about 10.30 on the morning, not 12 midday as some reports, on an L.C.I Landing Craft Infantry and ready to hear the 'Go!Go!Go!' as the ramp went down only to see the ramp disappear at right angles to the Deck. "Landing aborted!" was the cry. "Use the gangway on the side." The left side as we looked towards the chaos on shore, when the officer shouts, "You,you,you and you" me being one of the bigger lads preparing to disembark. "Take one of those ashore with you" pointing to the deck where there were five folding bicycles one on top of another. Not believing what I was seeing, then, "Come on, snap to it" from the 'Voice'. So off my shoulder came my rifle and bandolier of 50 rounds we began our descent into about 8 feet of water me taking a deep breath in, after seeing little Smithy's pack disappear in front of me, then his helmet went out of sight. My immediate thought was 'he's going to drown', so I let go a guide rope one of the American crew had taken ashore and tied to some object, and grabbed Smithy by the back of the collar of his battledress blouse and lifted him up out of the water, until it was my turn to fail to touch the bottom, so a deep breath and I was under. When I let go of Smithy I have no idea Nick, and neither have I any idea how I, and others, ever made it ashore. Only God above knows as thousands of miracles happened on that day, the 6th June 1944.

Yes I made it on to the road with the Voice shouting "Up there!" pointing up this road; then "Evans, give that bike to my batman", thereby denying me of a nice little ride to our rendezvous so I had to footslog it, diving in the ditch as the shells and mortars were still coming over. Took the Bridge intact at Vaux Sur Aure. Nightfall, I lay

back in a hollow in the high bank on the left hand side of the road, breaking some over hanging branches down in front of me, as camouflage, hoping to get the first shot in.

The Chateau Sully was a few miles short of our objective. Hell let loose, 88mm firing straight down the road at us advancing, on m/c gun either side as support. 36 Jones fell to the ground screaming his head off. I ran across to him to see blood oozing from his cheek, ripped open by shrapnel, his cheek bone visible. In my haste I took my own field dressing from my pocket, instead of his, and began bandaging his face, to try to stop the bleeding, when "Evans" leave him for the stretcher bearers; "Come on, come on!" So it was back into the fray go I. Not far when 'the Voice' shouts "B Coy. Do a right flanking". So up the 4-5 ft bank on our right, bulldozed through the hedgerow into a field, then swinging left to another hedgerow towards the rear of the Chateau. As we took a look from a break in the hedge, 3 tanks on the far side of the River Drome opened fire at us, when "Withdraw, Withdraw!" was yelled from behind, so it was hell for leather, back the way we had come, the 88mm m/c guns had been silenced. We heard long afterwards, Colonel Craddock had been wounded and some German S.P or Tiger had attacked HQ, destroyed 3 carriers and radio van. This was hear say I was not there.

The next day I helped search the Chateau, walked up the drive and on a well kept lawn- on our right 8 or 9 of our lads, lying face down dead, as if it had been execution. The lad in front of me stepped on to the lawn and turned the first one over. I then did the same with the second one and recognised him as Pt. Blackett, now in Bayeaux Cemetery. There is no mention of this in any history I have read about Chateau Sully, only it was a 'small action', so why the 'BATTLE HONOURS'? On the left hand lawn (well kept) was a 'Spitfire' of ours, a notice on the wall in German we gathered was; 'the 88mm had brought it down'? No mention of that either. Some history say the Yanks were at Sully - Yes, they were 'supposed' to be meeting us on our right, we being the extreme right flank of the British forces. I NEVER saw a Yank from D-Day till I was hospitalized on 28/29 August on the banks of the River Seine, 2 or 3 days before they crossed, when 14 of A'Coy got drowned trying to cross when the 'Mascaret' (Big Wave) hit them, like the big wave the River Severn bore.

From Sully next morning, the search of the Chateau, we were formed up and marched through Bayeaux with rifles at the slope with the people going crazy...lovely. (They still do it with me every year.) Then Ellou, Chouain, Buceels, Tilly Sur Suelles, Hottot, St Germain de Ectot, Villers Bocage, Aunay, Thury - Hacourt, Point d Ouilly to help close the gap at Falaise; and onto the Seine before the attack on Le Havre.

Me, to a Canadian Field Hospital for three days then Blighty, (So many wounded and dying coming in, I think). Lucky me to Burton on Trent Infirmary then Derby City Hospital, knee improves, so it is Etwall Convalescent, then Newtown Mid Wales holding battalion & training once more, fully expecting to join our 2nd Battalion. Mount Carmel as an R.P not 'Redcap'. Regimental (only) Police. 'See our Boyos behave!' Then over to Cyprus - Makarios & Co, then DEMOB £68 Demob Pay. I ask the sergeant "'Is that all?" his reply- "You can start your own business with that, lad."

So; home, demob leave; brother (younger) John, Welsh Guards also demobbed. Then I get digs with Welsh family in Coventry and back to Humber/Rootes Group for my job back; "Williams don't live here anymore". Again my older brother knows the

foreman well so I get a job in the engine shop at Stoke factory, - so my service is now continual, one good thing about life. So, I am divorced after family of three daughters. I have an accident at work and offered early retirement. I am now married again to Pat, a girl from the 'Black Country' as they call it. So, Pat does not like Coventry, so we move to North Wales. Then I am 80, big deal.

Retirement pension, 'old age' and bit of pension from Humber, Rootes Motors, Chrysler, Talbot/Peugeot. So Pat goes to Clwt-y-Bout Post Office to get now both our pensions. I KNEW Nick, I would have an increase on reaching 80, expecting about £2.50 to £3, so imagine if you can Sir, Pat comes home into our kitchen and said "I had my increase today", when I asked how much it was, she said "25 pence". I almost went through the B roof. Not so much an 'insult' Nick; more 'a kick in the TEETH' to me. Why bother? It must cost Work & Pensions Department quite a few pounds to make the alteration.

I wrote a short letter to the Minister of Work and Pensions stating I was a D-Day veteran and expected to be treated like a man who had given or helped this country, the pleasures she still enjoys today, not like a naughty schoolboy. I have a letter in reply from some Ms. thanking me and she has been asked to reply. The second paragraph upset me as much if not more than the 'twenty five pence'. 2nd Para 'The 80+ age allowance has not been reviewed since it was introduced in 1971.' 30 years and never been reviewed! I wrote again PERSONAL and from the minister, "I assure you Mr Evans the 80+ age allowance is reviewed every year."

Gwynedd Council are begging the now Welsh Assembly 'for more money for rural areas' and they build a glorified concert hall in Caernarfon costing 7 1/2 million pounds. Likewise our great new Welsh Assembly clowns are begging more money from London (Govt) for the rural areas of Wales, and I read the idiotic Rhodri Morgan spends £90,000 on two new dragon logos; not 1 but 2 for his paperwork heading. Then to boil my blood, as I am sure all our comrades bloods would boil, 68 million on a new Welsh Assembly building to show off to the Queen and our National Health Service in Wales is in a dire state. Where are we all going? No! Nick, our comrades in Normandie where I stand in front of 36 Jones grave, Blacketts grave in Bayeux Cemetery, R.G (Dai) Cross our 'B' Company sgt major in Hattot Cemetery and I cry when I say "What the hell have you died for lad???" The 'Asylum' used to be in Bridgend when I was a lad; never did I think it would move to the 'dump' as we called Cardiff. Quote me friend, and travel to Normandie and see/witness how the French people look after us.

Then you gave us Margaret Thatcher. No steel, no coal, no shipbuilding, excavating North Sea gas faster than she needed - never mind about tomorrow and conservation. Now we buy coal from abroad, millions of tonnes of it and millions of tonnes of our best coal lying at the bottom of all our pits in South Wales. Yes I worked in a deep colliery for 5 years, served my apprenticeship as you could say, but had enough after five years. Yes it was HARD, and dirty but men were working. Then she clobbers our veterans (who were left of us) pensions; by refusing to have a pension index linked keeping us the poorest paid in the country. We, all 80 year+olds, fought to keep Britain afloat.

Then the 'not to smack your children'? Now the children hit the parents when

they cannot have their own way. All our hidings were deserved, but taught us respect for people in authority, our parents, doctors, and hospital matrons and staff and believe it or not the Police! Now Sir, to answer your questions, honest and truthfully. Return to Civvy Street. - no job at Rootes/Humber except my brother friendly with the manager! Support for veterans? The National Lottery help, not government, for Normandie visits. Happy/disappointed? So disappointed when school children use language I heard in the pits!

Fallen comrades? They would not be very pleased. If any of them were able to return Sir, they would say much as I say at my comrades headstones. They'd say "My God! What did I die for? Whats happened to GREAT BRITAIN!" My honest opinion Sir.

Happy & Prosperous New Year Nick
Best Regards
Bill Evans
p.s Are you a Jeordie? (*Why Aye!*)

Dear Mr Pringle

Some time ago I saw your letter in our local newspaper, in which you said you would welcome communications from war veterans. I am one of these, and I have been meaning to write to you, but have been putting it off, which is a silly thing to do. I hope I'm not too late.

I was a signalman in the Royal Navy during the war, and served on HMS Belfast, escorting convoys to Russia, which were not the most enjoyable cruises you could imagine. Later, I served in mine sweepers and trawlers, sweeping the Thames Estuary, and later, after Overlord, over in Holland doing the same duties in the River Scheldt.

I see that your proposed book is intended to deal with veterans opinions on life today, based on what we expected in those days. Do we view the scene with satisfaction? The answer is no.

I realise, of course, that elderly people tend to feel let down by what they see. "Things were not like this in my day" is the cry, filled with prejudice and bitterness. I'm afraid I'm very much this way. My wife must be sick of the refrain.

Putting that on one side for the moment, and trying to be fair, I still say the situation is definitely inferior. All the people I know who served in the war feel the same. One particular friend was in the RAF from the beginning, serving on bombing raids over Berlin, said to me one day in the office where we worked; "Jim. Did you have a feeling of deep disappointment and let-down when the war was over?" I replied that I certainly did, and so did our other friends.

One reason for this attitude is that we had leadership in those days. Things were not glossed over as they are today. Churchill, in spite of his faults, which we all have in full measure, addressed himself to the problems confronting us, instead of

pretending that everything in the garden was rosy.

ARCTIC MEMORIES

As can easily be imagined, conditions on the Russian Convoys were frigid to say the least, but they would have to be experienced before one could have any idea of how terrible they could be. When we feel cold in our English winter, it's really not to be compared with those days and nights.

The worst time to be on deck was between the hours of midnight and four am. This was known as the middle watch, and on the day when I was scheduled to do my first one, an experienced seaman said to me "You haven't done a middle watch up here before have you?" When I answered "No." He added "Heaven help you!" He was right!

At five minutes to midnight I walked along the last of the warm, indoor corridors on my way up to the bridge where, as a signalman, I would spend the next four hours. I was muffled up with Arctic clothing to such an extent, that I looked more like a Yeti than a human being. I opened the door, and was greeted by such a blast of freezing air that I recoiled breathless into the corridor.

A screaming wind was blowing horizontally across the sea with such violence that I was afraid to go out on deck. I felt as if I was choking, and I stood there trying to find the courage to climb up to the bridge where the man I was supposed to relieve was waiting. Of course I had to. Will power was needed.

In the wings of the bridge were two seamen looking through binoculars at the turmoil of the ocean, while at the binnacle stood the officer on duty. My job was to watch for signals from any of the other naval vessels escorting the convoy. All four of us stood there in agony of that unbelievable cold; every minute an hour, and every hour a century.

Eventually, I went down to the galley to make a hot drink called Kye. This was grated chocolate on top of cocoa, which was simmering in a massive urn, and I carried up a container of the thick brew, to which we then added sugar and condensed milk. Today this would be regarded as gruesome in the extreme, but it was a life saver to us. It warmed us and restored some life.

There was danger as well as discomfort in the situation, because there came a time, when strangely enough, we didn't feel cold any more. On the contrary, a feeling of drowsy warmth crept over us and all we wanted to do was to go to sleep, which would have been fatal.

Of course, everything was not always like that on those trips. There were other times too; times of good companionship and fun. Every morning, for example, when reveille sounded, a gramophone record would be played over the tannoy system, and the deep voice of Crosby would be heard singing; "Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me." From hammocks throughout the ship his audience would groan; "Oh, not again, Bing."

One memory comes back of an incident which had a lighter side that only appeared much later. At the time, it was anything but amusing. We were sailing along in the dim, twilight world, when suddenly, without any warning, the ship was lifted and plunged heavily over to starboard. Everyone and everything was sent skidding

across the deck, and there she stayed, at that impossible angle. No-one had any idea of what had happened. The captain climbed up the sloping deck and peered over the side. I copied him, and, as we looked down, to our amazement, we saw a huge whale emerge from under the hull and swim away. The ship then rocked to and fro, recovering her equilibrium. We realised then that the whale must have come to the surface at the precise moment that we were sailing over that spot, and lifted a massive cruiser on its back.

In 1993 I was invited to a service on HMS Belfast, where she lay near Tower Bridge. It was to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the sinking of the German Battleship Scharnhorst, which happened on Boxing Day 1943. As my wife and I sat on the quarterdeck, which I knew so well, many memories came back of that day. Near to us sat some of the survivors from the German ship. How could I know that one day, half a century later, I would be on the same ship again in completely different circumstances?

My Regards
James Foote

Dear Mr Pringle

Going back some, I had to leave school on my 14th birthday and take whatever job I was given at the Labour Exchange. Digging trenches, pick and shovel, 50p per week and the wife got 1 penny a day in service. Times were hard, I'd fight the school bully for anyone for two sweets. I had odd boots and a patch on the seat of my trousers, God help anyone who called me Patchy Ass. However come 18, all my friends had gone to serve, so volunteered to serve over and above my call or duty. Went for a medical. They felt me and I was warm. 'Pass!' they said 'A1'.

I volunteered to serve overseas, pay 54 pence 14/- per week and not knowing where I was bound for. Six weeks at sea later, we ended up in Egypt. Big sand storm blowing, one mile high. I thought blow this for four years. All over the Middle East we went. Then over to Italy from Foggia up north, as far as Piza then back again to Israel.

I soon grew up and I now say 'What for?' I say dress our boys the same as the enemy, so no-one would know who to shoot at, or get radio controlled small robots to do the job. The country today has too many Chiefs and not enough Indians. Bring the lads home to prepare for the consequences of global warming. I still suffer from the War, but I do get a pension. I can't hear and find myself drowning in a sea of silence, but we are both OK, no lumps or bumps and still drive, 64 years no accidents and the Wife still mixes the concrete 3,2,1. I worked hard when I was younger and paid cash for this little bungalow overlooking Snowdon Mountains range and Newborough Forest and just let the world pass by.

There was no TV, penicillin, polio shots, frozen food, xerox plastics, contact lenses, videos, the pill, radar, credit cards, split atoms, laser beam, ball point pens, dishwashers, tumble dryers, electric blankets, before man walked on the Moon, artificial

hearts, yoghurt, FM radio, disposable nappies or young men wearing earrings. We got married first then lived together, crumpet we had for tea, etc, etc.

Bye for now
Mr Young (and Mrs 'Rotund')

Dear Nick Pringle

I left school at 14 years old to work in Furness shipyard as a Rivet Catcher. A few months later WW11 started and I volunteered as a messenger boy with the A.R.P (Air Raid Precautions later Civil Defence). I still have the silver badge.

When the Air Training Corps started I joined as a cadet and learned about Morse Code and aircraft recognition.

I volunteered for aircrew because I was then working in a steelworks making Bailey Bridges for the Army and was in a reserved occupation so would not have been called up. After a three day examination in Doncaster (medical, physical and writing) I was passed for an air gunner, so in December 1943 I joined the R.A.F and became a rear gunner on Lancaster Bombers. We completed the full tour of 30 ops and were expecting to go to Japan, but the Atom bomb was dropped and we didn't go.

I was de-mobbed in 1947 but I found I could not stand the steelworks so when the National Fire Service was de-nationalised, I joined Middlesborough Fire Brigade. I stayed the 18 years and during that time I was voluntary seconded to Larnaca, in Cyprus, in charge of the two fire stations, as the Greeks and Turks were in trouble and it was difficult to get a Greek to put out a Turk fire and a Turk to put out a Greek fire.

I was also seconded to the Home Office as an instructor to ex R.A.F on the Green Goddess fire engines, in case the Russians started a war and dropped atom bombs. I later went as a senior instructor.

I left Middlesborough Fire Brigade after 18 years and went to Durham Fire Brigade as commandant of the training school, later I was officer in charge of Swalwell, Chopwell and Birtley Fire Station's and, when the county boundaries changed, I was in Tyne and Wear Fire Brigade. After 30 years I retired on full pension in 1978 and worked for six years as a hospital fire officer on Merseyside with the N.H.S. I then went to Saudi Arabia training the Kings Fire Brigade.

After I was retired at 65 I did voluntary work, (as Meals on Wheels, but this was privatised so I now do voluntary work in hospitals.)

Since those who fought in the war are living on a pension I think it was a bad deal to cut the Old Age pension. If we had not stopped the Germans taking over the country all the Jews who live here would have died in concentration camps. When my Mother died the Jew, who had bought up the houses cheap after the Middlesborough Railway Station was bombed, evicted my sister and I. She went to Canada and has stayed there. I left Middlesborough and never went back.

Ernie

(2nd letter.)
Dear Nick

Thank you for your letter. I do find it difficult to recall things that happened 1943 to 1947 during the time I was in the RAF and at 18 years old my thoughts were somewhat different now at 82 years.

Yes we were called 'Tail End Charlies' but some others did not say we were rear gunners...they used to say gunner rear, which was and is a word for a sex disease, Gonorrhea.

There was a couple of things that I think might have been unusual:

(1) As a rear gunner we had electric suits that fitted under the flying kit and I remember on one raid that my foot began to burn, so I switched off the electric suit and then after a while I began to shiver. So, I turned it back on again, and then my foot began to burn, so this went on until we got back.. I did have some blisters on my foot.

(2) On one trip we flew through 10/10 cloud and then climbed to over 20,000 feet. After we had bombed we dropped down to about 10,000 feet and then there was two 'WOOPS' sounding followed by other bumps. We all wondered what it was until the bomb aimer said "There is two 500 lb bombs rolling around in the bomb bay with the detonators on". The pilot said to the navigator "Are we still over Germany?" and got the answer "Yes" so he said "Open the bomb bay" and so the two bombs went. I often wonder if the Germans were mystified as to why the R.A.F were dropping bombs in open country.

I think what happened was that as we flew through 10/10 cloud the moisture from the clouds got on to the hooks holding the bombs and then when we went up to 20,000 feet it froze and two of the bombs never dropped, but when we went lower the ice would melt and the bombs dropped off the hooks into the bomb bay.

(3) I always, round my neck, wore 'Lucky Knickers' (I still have them) from my girlfriend, and all the crew used to touch them before we took off. That's why we survived a full tour, however on one trip, my lucky knickers had been taken from my flying suit. (It was one of the girls who looked after our flying kit and parachutes). I wasn't really bothered but the flight engineer was, and he stormed into the kit room and got the lucky knickers back.

(4) On the Berlin raid we were told that there was a 17 mile belt of searchlights and if you were picked up on one, they would hand you over to the next, so you would be highlighted for 17 miles. We got picked up approaching Berlin and then the searchlight went out. The wireless operator told us he had seen a German aircraft in the searchlight and noted the 'Colours of the Day' so when we were picked up he fired off the German colours and they assumed that we were German. "Colours of the Day" were used by both British & German aircraft. If you were being shot at by your own forces then the colours of the day should let them know who you are. Although they were called

Colours of the Day, they changed colour every six hours. Whenever we took off we would put the colours in the pistol and when the six hours were up we would change them. They would prevent what is known now as 'Friendly Fire'.

The last entry in my flying log book was "LOW LEVEL SAND BAG DROPPING" and almost everyone who reads it wonders why we were dropping sand bags at low level. Hardly anyone knows why, but the reason was to practice for the Manna trip. In Belgium starvation was starting because the Germans had blown up the dykes and the food ships could not get in, so the R.A.F dropped dried food (eggs, potatoes, milk, etc) on to playing fields at low level, so as not to damage the food. The Germans agreed because they were also starving. The R.A.F Bombers had to fly with guns unloaded in case of accidents.

During 'Systematic Sky Search' (I would be looking 'Port Side' and the mid-upper would be looking Starboard side), I noticed four Lancaster Bombers in a flying triangle a long way on the Port side and when I was looking on the Port side again, there was only a cloud of dust, so one of the bombers bomb load had been hit and when it blew up it took the three others with it (28 men all doing their jobs) and in a second they were all dead and blown into tiny bits of meat.

Being a rear gunner I could not see where we were going, so when we were approaching the target I could hear them saying "God..look at those searchlights, Blimey can you see all the flak??" Of course I could see nothing, but after we had bombed and we were turning away from the target I could then see all the flak and searchlights, but it was no use me saying anything because they could not see the flak then.

When the Blockbuster bomb arrived one Lancaster taking off was struggling with all four engines roaring and someone said "Hey, if we are going by road, you will have to hurry up".

Regards
Ernie Reynolds

Dear Nick

Firstly, thanks for your reply Xmas Card. Next sorry for not replying sooner, you see we had some storm damage (not serious) got the roof fixed - getting the ceiling repaired took longer. During this time a week before Xmas, my wife had a fall and fractured her shoulder in two places, so you see I was busy early on.

I was 81 in Jan. I was called up in May '44 in the army and reported to Colchester and had six weeks basic training, despite us being 18yr olds. We were undernourished kids really.

I was posted to Ripley in Derbyshire, RASC 9th training battalion, billeted above a pub in the town square. The town was packed with young blokes, army types, Yanks and hundreds of Bevin Boys as the town had a number of coal mines. Can you imagine the fighting as the town had its fair share of pubs?!

D-day had happened about a month before so they were training as many to drive and maintain vehicles as they could but they also came looking for people to join parachute outfits. We sat for a long lecture in the church hall and we all agreed, looking along the row with a shake of the head, that it wasn't for us.

Another lecture in the church hall about the glory of being in the military police. I knew I had a birth certificate any-way, we greeted that the same way.

The third lecture was for us to join an amphibious company, part of the RASC, and the response was overwhelming. We travelled up to Rothsey on the Firth of Clyde overnight, didn't know till we arrived where we were, what luck we'd only spent ten days in Ripley and it rained every day when we were there. I'm sure I could not have learned to drive then anyway.

Now I'm in a waterborne training company, learning morse, navigation seamanship, etc from ex merchant sea officers and some various others connected to the maritime world, with some very interesting craft to train on. Very nice area of Scotland to spend time, no blackouts, Largs and Millport two seaside resorts...almost like peacetime.

After spending around 4/5 months to complete training, went down the coast to a holding unit in Stranraer. Two week cooking course, my first leave. Glad to get back, too many flying bombs at home. On our return we are up for posting, you had to be 19 on reaching the other end wherever that was. Two of us kept saying we were too young till we were rumbled when they checked our pay books. We were posted to 884 Company RASC Water Transport and within no time at all in Liverpool Docks looking at the P&O Liner Strathirden which we promptly went aboard with 6,000 others.

Personally, I had a great time, a change from delivering milk in Londons East End seven days a week, character building stuff. All the young folk nowadays think they know it all. If you want to know something of 2 1/2 years in the Far East, let me know.

All the Best Ted

P.S Sorry for the delay, wife having physio still.

(2nd letter)

Dear Nick

Thanks for the letter. I'm still busy, trying to sell a lot of my back garden. Dodgy leg is getting more so. On board P&O Liner Stratheden, 32,000 ton sailing down the Mersey, speculation about whats out there underneath the waves. We are on mess decks with tables and benches fixed to the deck and fastenings above to unroll and swing a hammock each night. You couldn't swing too far, too close to the next bloke.

Didn't go the short way, went out above I.O.M (Isle of Man) and Northern Ireland, way out into the Atlantic and joined a convoy then turned and headed for Gibraltar. Twenty foot waves at times, lots of lads were seasick, I was lucky it didn't get me.

On the stern of the ship was mounted one big naval gun. Can't imagine what

they would shoot with it but they threw targets over the stern a few times and fired the gun which shook the ship a bit, more of a moral booster I think.

Not much to do on board, boat drill of course, put on a life jacket and dash up several flights of steps to muster on deck. Ships officer came round each morning to make sure the place was spotless, played hell if it wasn't. Met four lads from the Royal Horse Artillery- 'poor buggers', they'd come home from some hill station on the Indian border after about four years and were being sent back again. You could imagine the frame of mind of some of them.

After a while we found we had a new destroyer escort, they were painted a different colour. Passed Gibraltar and thro' the Med and finally the Suez canal. Stopped at either end for a spell, natives alongside selling everything you imagine, then on thro' the Indian Ocean to Bombay.

By this time we are wearing our tropical gear. The ship is along-side, the gangway is down, comes time to disembark, we're looking for the trucks, all perspiring just looking over the rail. We came ashore, formed up and marched a couple of miles to the railway station, then off to the transit camp.

On the way to the station we passed several government buildings with big guys in turbans & smart drill, stood guard and as we passed, presented arms in salute. I was glad they were on our side. Gloss over the transit camp, except to say about all the young kids around grabbing un-eaten food from the slop bins. Down to the station, just after midnight, no train in sight, slept on the platform still wearing all kit till the train came at 8 o'clock. Next stop Calcutta, I'd never spent a whole week on a train, no water, hole in the floor for toilets & lattice wood instead of glass. We'd been warned about hygiene and buying any food. Every stop or slow down, day or night, some came round with fruit mainly and hard boiled eggs. Our only chance to stay clean was at stops & junctions where they have those water tanks on stills to replenish the boiler of the steam loco. We were there in shorts soaping up. If there was clean water we found it! Before we reached Calcutta 30-40 had gone down with Dysentery - the thing that's known to kill.

Having reached our destination we didn't stay long. We were off to the airfield and we stayed long enough to change colour - every bit of clothing or equipment you dipped into Jungle Green Dye, even towels, handkerchiefs. We had bush hats issued too like the Aussie's wear. At the airfield we were counted off, threw our kit on board a Dakota and climbed in after it, no door, no seats. We flew quite low over this expanse of jungle.

We were in the air for about half an hour and felt we were coming in to land, then realised we were back at the airfield as one of the engines had packed up, so the process started off again and we finally landed at a clearing in the jungle about the size of a football pitch. The start of our trip to Burma.

First off we were under canvas in Chittagong in paddy fields. First day a tropic storm and we're washed out and find a derelict convent. The journey gets a bit hazy by this time. I remember a hair raising journey one night over a range of hills on American tucks (Diamond T's) but driven by Indian troops, not the best drivers, they either past their tests on rickshaws or ox-carts. My first air flight was bad enough, but hundreds of

feet up on mountain passes, snow on the ground, freezing cold, and these guys are free wheeling on the easy bits, we all finally survive and finally reach another camp protected by barbed wire and mines with the skull and crossbone sign here and there.

We've further still to go, no transport anywhere, then offered the choice to take a substantial number of Jeeps for delivery to where we're going. I'd opted out of the driving way back in Derbyshire long since, so went passenger driving all night in pitch dark. My companion was a regular, who at one time served in Cuba before the war.

We finally reached Kalewa on the Chinwin River, quite a good camp, good tents, on a bank high above the river. We heard the news that Mandelay had been taken by the Allies and the Nips were on the run. Someone had managed to bring in a great supply of parts and engines. They started assembling these iron sections to make small tug boats about thirty foot long, with local labour under supervision.

The first was a flop. They used cold rivets and it leaked like a sieve. Anyway, we finally got our boat, twin diesels with a superstructure over and small deck at the rear. The rest of the boat was open to the elements, so we set to work with a machete and split down some long bamboos about four inches wide and made a double skin top with tarpaulin we were given, we were in business. There were four of us, two deckhands including me, an engineer and the sergeant who was coxswain & skipper.

EXTRA

Somewhere along the way into Burma, I missed out the boat trip. It took a few hours. The River Ganges, fast flowing, wide, something like the Severn. Nice boat, I enjoyed the trip. Along the way came mealtime and we had hard ration like biscuits and Bully Beef and a brew up. Then we were plagued by birds, big ones, huge wing span. Kite Hawks swooping down like seagulls. One guy lost most of his grub and a fork as well - carried away in the claws of one of these birds.

EXTRA

From the time of the transit camp, something else came on the scene, on a par with a mobile chippie. The char walla, a local carrying a big container on his back of water and a bucket shaped earthenware grill with hot charcoal, the first exponent of fast food on record. Hot mug of tea and an 'Egg Banjo' is what he sold in double quick time. An 'Egg Banjo' is one fried rice and fluffy with runny yolk served between two slices of thick new white bread. The bread didn't always soak up all the yolk so you brushed it off your shirt as if to play the Banjo.

Can't write anymore just now, next time down river. Let me know if you want some more. Wife has scolded her leg, spilling a cup of tea.

Like a good many other English people, very disillusioned.

Ted

(3rd Letter)

Dear Nick

Finally got around to continuing our liaison, sorry, but Jean was in trouble again. You see we had a bar meal in Weston Supermare at a hotel we'd been to many times before. Anyway, she was quite ill at the time and it developed into some kind of virus, causing us great problems for 7-8 weeks.

We set off from Kalewa towing two steel barges. One each side, loaded with supplies. We were going for half a day and hit a sand bank. We tried every way to get off, till I got over the side with a shovel and got digging, and we finally got off. We made it down river and into the Irrawaddy in a few days, swapped the barges for two empties and made it back in about a week; round trip 500 miles. Second trip was a bit eventful as the river was running high, by this time at the start of the monsoons, with a load in under two days.

All manner of things happened on the way back. I went over the side for a dip, lost my grip and managed to grab the stern on the way up. We ran short of food coming back. For by this time the water had risen about 15-20 ft. We traded for eggs, chickens, mangos, wild bananas - anything edible. It took well over a month to get back. The last I remember of Kalewa the water was lapping the edge of the camp and there was a small steam loco tied onto a section of Bailey bridge ready to go down. They had a clever way of sending down drums of fuel. 50 gal drums lashed together by the Burmese with a bamboo platform covering the top, 3 or 4 crew, one steering with a pole at the rear.

We set off for Calcutta during the monsoon season, cadging rides, setting up camp anywhere. Never dry, but we made it in a couple of weeks. V.E Day was passed before we left Kalewa, so we were destined to move on from India. We were housed in a small block of flats in the native quarter with a balcony along each floor. We had harbour launches, now the ones we had used at home, which had to be painted over the blue - green, yellow and black streaks and other modifications. All the boats were moored in some God forsaken place called Doppa lock. The whole area smelt awful. There was a glue factory nearby, a corrugated iron structure with heaps of animal hoofs piled up, which were to be boiled down. The worst bit of all was a couple of dozen Vultures lined along the pitch of the roof waiting for the waste, like king sized Starlings.

We spent a couple of months in Calcutta, reputed at the time to have 3 million living on the streets. There was an oasis, Chowringee, something like London's West End. There was 17 cinemas (most showing up to date releases) and a couple of very nice restaurants, heavily subsidised for the Services. We also got Rupee concession, which was a good exchange rate. We'd walk into town which took about 1/2 hour and there was a nice ice cream parlour on the way home. Back at the billet we had a communal shower in the yard which was good, but the wooden beds, mosquito nets and woodwork were infested with bed bugs, big ones, so we had to make a big bonfire of the mossi nets and soak everything else in D.D.T, lethal stuff. We all got Ringworm and discovered the guy doing our laundry was drying our clothes on the grass where cattle laid. I got an enormous boil on my leg, feeling a bit down, they were one short for a

game of football, you guessed it. I got hit by the ball, never ever felt pain like it.

Come the day Japan was bombed and it was all over, so it was then decided to do a mock invasion of Malaya. Dropped off a troop-ship, but once again I fell on my feet, with 3 others, to go with stores and 2 launches aboard a boat going to Singapore and to cook for a crowd of Royal Engineers.

Regards
Ted Parsons

Dear Mr Pringle

Summer of 1939 was to be our last. We were no longer children, but we were all still together and of course still had the river and our boats. I also remember the two boys down the lane. Peter and John managed to acquire a very old Austin, we called her Gertie. She was held together with string and bits of this and that, but she 'went'; not very fast, but that didn't matter. Although we still had our bikes, Gertie was our status symbol. I wonder what happened to her?

By August of that year, my father was called to go and play soldiers. He was in the Territorial Army and knew what was about to happen. I didn't see or hear of him until the end of the war, 1945.

Children in vast numbers were being sent out of London to the country, in the hope they would be safe. Poor little souls; I can see them now, carrying their gas masks, a small case with a few things from home, and a label tied on them somewhere. We had a family from the East End. Mum, dad and two children of about eight and ten, I can't remember. All I know is that I spent a lot of time dragging them out of the river, for neither of them could swim.

At the end of 1939, on the recommendation of a family friend, I went for an interview at a Naval establishment a few miles the other side of Datchet. It was the Admiralty Compass Observatory, known for short as A.C.O. Here was where all the compasses were tested for both ships, large and small, and aircraft. I was taken on and started just after Christmas. I remember being told I could not wear steel in my corsets or hair-clips - these would send the needles of the compasses all over the place, which was not a good idea. I have to smile, for at the age of nineteen, I hardly knew what a corset was.

The A.C.O was at that time, the only testing station; 1940 was to be a busy year for us. The Battle of Britain and the evacuation of Dunkirk, all those boats, large and small, some of them no bigger than river launches, needed a compass, and we worked flat out to see that the demand was met. As 1940 moved on, the bombing started; not very heavily, but enough to concern our bosses.

A great many of our compasses came down from John Brown's shipyard on the Clyde, and were likely to be bombed on the way to us; trains were prime targets. The summer of that year found four of us all packed up and ready for a sleeper trip to Glasgow, where we were to live and work. Our boss was Lt.Cmdr. Flower. He was a

gem, and we loved him. As time went on, he rented a house close by, and brought his wife up. I'm afraid I gave them new names, which I'm sure they knew, Buttercup and Daisy. They didn't hold it against me, and were very kind to all of us.

There were cinemas and many theatres where for a few shillings, one could watch the best performers of the day. It was on one such occasion that my colleague and I were watching 'Chocolate Soldier', a musical with lovely songs; a soppy story but enjoyable. I think it was about half-way through, when the manager came to the footlights to say the air raid warning had gone. Those who wished to leave to go quickly through the side door, but the show would go on. We decided to stay, but not for long. Loud bangs were going on outside, and bits of plaster, and plenty of dust were coming down, as did the curtain. So we all left the theatre, to face what was going on outside.

In a nutshell, Germany had sent a fair number of bombers to try and put the Clyde shipyards out of business, and at the same time giving central Glasgow quite a battering. We did manage to hop on a tram which, after moving a few yards, was stopped by a land-mine. It felt very close, but all I remember was everyone was covered in broken glass. Some were cut, and were treated by first aid workers. We got off the tram, unharmed, and went to see if we could help. All the services were there, doing their job as they always do. There was a great deal of noise, a lot of rubble, and everywhere lit up by burning buildings.

After a while I felt I should like to be nearer the action, so I went to see my Commander. He was an understanding man, and when I asked him to let me join the W.R.N.S, said I could go, gave me a pep talk, and sent me on his way with his blessing.

I was duly called up and went to a holding depot at Mill Hill in London, where I joined many other girls. My compass experience seemed to count for something. I was to go on several courses to become a seaman torpedo-woman. First we had to go on a months course at a government training establishment in Hounslow, to learn electrics and also brush up on our maths. Oh dear! We caught a 6.00 am train from Earls Court underground, trying not to disturb the many people who spent the nights there. All the underground stations had rows and rows of two tier bunks where half London's population slept; mostly young mums with their children, and the elderly. They were warm, reasonably safe and cheerful.

Our next course was in Brighton, a month by the seaside - not really. This was where we were to learn all about the workings of a torpedo. I got quite fond of them, this was something one could see and take to pieces. Brighton was all dressed up for war. Miles of barbed wire all along the beach. Any German who tried to get in that way would have been torn to pieces. Roedean Girls School was now a naval base. All of us having passed were sent there to receive our trade badges.

My first posting was to Lowestoft. This was an active service station; our Motor Torpedo Boats (M.T.B.'s) were going out every night to do battle with German E-boats. These were the equivalent of ours although I never saw one. These were bloody encounters in the true sense of the word, and to see some of them coming home the worse for wear, was a sorry sight. These little boats, the M.T.B's, had three Rolls Royce engines in the stern. They carried two eighteen inch torpedoes, a number of depth

charges and (I think) a rear gun. They were very fast, could turn on a sixpence and I loved them.

My next destination was Fort William, a training base far away from the air raids. This time I was to work on the Motor Launches (M.L.'s), looking after their electrics. Fort William was really not much more than a village. A single street with a few shops and several hotels, all taken over by the navy. Ben Nevis looked down on us, a bit of snow on the summit at all times. This of course was not the sea, but the loch, very calm most of the time, and very cold. I know - I fell in once.

After lunch we all had to report back to the workshop chief to get our orders for the rest of the day. 'Chiefie', as we all called him, was usually in a benevolent mood after his pre-lunch tot of rum. He sent Fred, my petty officer gaffer, and myself off to our favourite M.L 178. It so happened that I was going out with 178's chief engineer, Bill, so this was an agreeable arrangement all round.

Fred gave me the ammeter to carry, and off I went to the jetty. Moored alongside were four M.L's lying side by side. 178 being the furthest out, therefore the first to go to sea. The crew never lowered the guard rails, so we had to side step over them, from boat to boat, dodging bits of this and that on the deck; not all that easy when the boats were were bobbing about and one is clad in a lot of clothes, plus an oilskin. After high stepping over and over rail after rail, carrying the ammeter, I forgot to stop and went over the side, right to the bottom.

It was rather more serious than I knew. The crew, having missed my leap over the last rail into the loch, thought we were both on board and Bill started up the engines and the propellers were turning. Fred shouted: "Stop engines. My wren's in the drink!" I knew nothing of this. I surfaced, complete with my ammeter, and Bill hauled me on board, asking if I had caught any fish, and what was the weather like down there? I was cold and bedraggled, I could have killed him. I have often thought that the least they could have done was gave me a tot of rum. Rotten lot! Of course, I never lived it down. Remarks like: "Fancy a quick dip?" were very normal. It was all good fun, and I was the only wren daft enough to do it.

Home leave was rare, it took so long to get down south. Often it was cancelled, depending on the state of the war. I did manage to get home in about the middle of 1943. I remember it was dark when I got to Waterloo, found the Windsor train, and jumped on. We got as far as Clapham Junction only to be told there was an air raid in progress and they had bombed the line further down. I ran up the long tunnel into the Northcote Road, shoved my tin hat on and made a run for my aunt's house in Bennerley Road. This really was scary, bits of shrapnel and all sorts were coming down. I got to number 83 and fell into the door, much to my poor aunt's surprise. We had a pot of tea and went to bed. Most people slept downstairs, and I was glad to 'kip' on a mattress under my grandmother's very solid mahogany dining table.

In early 1944 the 'buzz' was that Fort William as a naval base was to be disbanded. This turned out to be true and little by little we were all drafted. The boats were the first and I was sad to see them go for both the skippers and crew were our friends, kind, helpful and very generous with cigarettes and chocolate. I was sent to the Isle of Man, where the Fleet Air Arm were training young pilots how, where and when

to drop their torpedoes, and I was back in the workshop. The planes were single-engine Barracudas. They had a crew of three; pilot, observer and rear gunner. Our job was to service their torpedoes, run them out on a trolley and strap them under the belly of the plane. At first I took a dim view of this place; miles of concrete everywhere. After a month or two I settled down and found the island a pretty place. Lots of little bays and unspoilt countryside just a bike ride away. I stayed on the island until the end of war in Europe, May 8th, now known as V.E Day. This was a cause of great celebration and some of the day is a bit of blur. We all had the day off and, I believe, drank the whole of the Isle of Man as dry as a bone.

It was to be some months before my demob came through. The workshops had closed down and we were found little tasks to do helping out where another pair of hands might be useful. One lovely Saturday morning in July found me in one of the hangers thinking a trip up in the sky might be rather nice. I managed to talk the chief in charge into letting me go up. I was duly 'kitted' out; parachute, Mae West, intercom etc. and off we went into the wide blue yonder.

I can see it all to this day. Miles of blue sky, white fluffy clouds, all was right with the world - but it wasn't. Oil was streaming out of one of our engines. The pilot told me to open my hood and get ready to jump into the sea. This was indeed scary. Even worse, I couldn't open my hood, it was stuck fast. The pilot then said he would try and get back over some land and, bless his heart, put us down in a cornfield. The poor plane was a tangled wreck, but at least it didn't catch fire. I crawled out of a pile of earth with nothing worse than a badly cut right foot and a lot of painful bruises. The pilot and rear gunner hadn't a scratch. It was sick bay for me for quite a few weeks. They did X-ray quite a lot of me, but nothing was broken. I was indeed a very lucky Wren.

We went to war to fight the evil doings of Adolf Hitler and to save this once great country, the call came and was answered.

What we have today is not the country we fought and many died for. All the immigrants who have come here, they have taken over our towns, cities, houses and jobs, not to mention the enormous drain on our Health Service. To my mind the biggest scandal of all is the closure of care homes, to make people sell their houses to pay for care, to shut the door on those who saved this country is unforgivable.

Technology and its rate of progress is something I fear, I just want things to slow down a bit. I personally am so glad I was born when I was, those far off days were not so bad, one did have time 'to stand and stare!!'

As always I watch the service at the Cenotaph and see all the veterans march, the pride is in their bearing for all to see, they are proud of what they did, ask anyone of them if they would do it all again, the answer would be "of course!"

Yours Sincerely
Joan Hull

Dear Mr Pringle

Referring to your letter in the Addlestone Local Paper. I was in the 46th Infantry Division, 6th Y&L Regt, 1942 we were on the Southern coast around Kent. 1943 January, we went with the 1st Army, to Algiers, Tunisia, N Africa. There was two or three of my pals from Barnsley who I was called up with killed, I was lucky.

My brother Harold volunteered for the Regulars in the 1st Yorks and Lancs in 1934. He served his time in India until about 1941, when he was posted to Greece and Crete. During that year he was posted as missing and presumed dead. Twelve months later he was found in a hospital in Crete, recovering, but badly burnt all over. My eldest brother Wilf was on the rock of Gibraltar for four years. He came home to England, but was killed by a land mine on 17th November, 1944 while clearing the beaches at Redcar.

My regiment helped to push back the Italians and Germans off all the mountains around Tunisia. During the North African campaign we were fighting the Germans and were instructed to fix our bayonets and advance. We went forward firing at the two German machine gun positions. As we got closer they stood up with their hands in their ready to surrender. My mate - whose name I can't remember - just stepped forward and bayoneted one of them.

Then Tunis and Bizerta fell and the 8th Army joined with the 1st on 10 May, 1943. On the 12th the Germans surrendered and that was the end of the North African Campaign. From the end of May to September we were guarding the prisoners of war camps and training on the Tank Landing Crafts (TLCs). On September 9 1943 we went across on the invasion of Italy, Salerno Landings.

On the 10th day I was wounded by shrapnel in my left thigh (and it's still there). I was taken by hospital ship to Bizerta, North Africa. After three months of hospital and convalescence, I was posted to the Queens Own Yorkshire Dragoons Regiment and in February 1944 sent to Anzio, near Rome. We were pinned down on the beach head of Anzio, an area of 20 miles by 12 miles, for three months. One of the scariest times was on Anzio. I was in a slit trench six feet by six feet. My mate was number 1 with a Bren (machine) gun and I was the number 2 with my rifle. We were firing at Gerry attacking us and my mate was hit by machine gun fire. He slumped over the Bren gun and then I heard shouted orders to pull back and withdraw. I tried to pull him off the gun, but blood was gushing out all over and I just couldn't manage it. When we got back to base I said I thought my mate was dead and I was played hell with, because I didn't have the Bren gun. So that night we went back to the defence positions, but he wasn't there and the Bren gun had gone.

We were actually within three miles of Rome when it fell on 4 June. We then went past Rome and Florence and in September, when the Yorkshire Dragoons disbanded, I was transferred back to the 6th Yorkshire and Lancashire regiment. It meant quite a journey as I had to get to the other side of the country to Ancona in Rimini.

We then went to Bologna where I was wounded again. We were upstairs in an old farmhouse when it happened. A Gerry threw a hand grenade through the window and I was buried in the rubble. I was found, unhurt apart from a scrapped back, but badly shaken.

I was taken to No 70 B.P.C where, after a week or so, I was down graded from

being A1 to B1 with my nerves, so then I was from the firing line, to a light job, which was doing clerical work, sorting files out for getting the troops home, called Python. I was working opposite two A.T.S girls. After 12 months or so, I was sent home for demob.

Just over two years ago, I had a phone call. It was one of the ATS called Vera from Surrey. She had traced me to this address, after 60 years or so. We have been phone a friends since and phone daily. We have both been married, but lost our loved ones.

As for the country, I don't really know what to say, I think some things are better. But I don't think you can beat the bad old days, late 40s & 50s. We may not have had a load of material things, but you were a lot safer & happier. Close now, enough said.

R Knowles

P.S We are both 84 years young.

Dear Nick

I recently saw your letter in the Western Gazette, which I normally would not bother with. I am 82 and served with the Women's Land Army from 1943-46 in South Devon. This on a mixed farm, milking cows, working with horses, fruit picking and flower growing, etc. I lived on the farm. Our day started at 7am and ended around 10pm throughout late spring and summer, 7pm in winter.

In 1949 I met and married my late husband who had served overseas with the Army from 1942-46. All involved in that terrible war suffered deprivations for years after, worked and fought tirelessly so that our families and future generations might enjoy freedom from the terrors which threatened us and create a 'brave new world'. What did our sacrifices achieve? You have only to watch Andrew Marrs 'History of Modern Britain' to learn some of the depressing answers.

We had known nothing of TV or videos, they were to invade our homes under the auspices of entertainment and comedy. We saw the advent of the pill and the collapse of earlier morality. Drugs were unknown among the general public. Now they have become freely available, leading to extreme social problems.

In families and schools respect for others and discipline were achieved, this no longer is the case. Families remained together, divorce a rarity, perhaps for film stars and a Kings Consort. Children felt secure. Were our sacrifices made so hooligans may run wild? And aggressive behaviour be accepted as the norm by TV interviewers and society in general?

Were our sacrifices made to create a culture of 'worship' for so called celebrities, many of whom are unknown to most of us? Why do the British public confuse sentimentality with genuine concern for others?

In conclusion, we still thankfully have many good, helpful, unassuming people in our society and I am deeply grateful that I have met with so much kindness. This still

leaves the Great British public so much to answer for, so much greed and the importance of 'I' appears in all stratas of society.

On the other hand we all have so much to be grateful for. So much progress has been made to transform the standard of living since the war, but are people any happier? Were those dreadful sacrifices worthwhile?

Yours Sincerely
Mrs Haggett

Dear Nick

Your letter in the Belfast Telegraph intrigued me. Also I applaud your diligence and knowledge that you know to include N.I in the UK. I am almost 85 and visually impaired, an ex Engineer of the Merchant Navy. Served during WW2 in fleet oil tankers. I am glad to ensure the freedom of today's young people. I hold medal stars for Atlantic, Italy, Home Defence, Pacific and Burma Bar, and Victory and 1939-45 Star.

I served in the Merchant Navy after the war and was an Engineer Surveyor before retirement. I was with Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Co Ltd, known as the Anglo-Geordie Co, and I had many friends on the NE coast - Wallsend, Jarrow, Alnwick, Whitley Bay and Newcastle.

Sincerely
Tom Carter

(Due to Mr Carters eyesight he requested a few questions in large print to answer rather than write a full letter.)

What was your job?

1938-42 Apprentice Fitter H&W Ltd Belfast

1942-45 5th Engineer, Anglo Saxon Petroleum Co. Ltd

1945-53 Up to 2nd Engineer China Navigation, Bank Line, Jack Billmeir, and Nourse Line.

Where did you sail to?

Londonderry>New York>

Rosyth>Gibraltar>Malta>Italy>Abadan>Karachi>Colombo>Calcutta>Perth>Adelaide>Sydney
UK Ports.

Were there many encounters with enemy ships, if so what happened?

German U Boats several times, German and Italian aircraft, several shot down, several casualties amongst the dems gunners in Mediterranean, several efforts by Japanese submarines to sink our ship.

Your happiest/funniest moment during the war?

When we got leave for one week in Calcutta and went up to Darjeeling in the Himalayas, a most beautiful trip, about 300 miles by rail climbing all the way to 8,000ft. One morning we rode mules up to 12,000ft to watch the sunrise over Everest.

Your saddest moment during the war?

Right at the start in Nov 1939. My boyhood pal Wilson Rowan Sgt W/O Air Gunner, RAF was killed on Reconnaissance over Helligoland.

Your most vivid memory of the war?

The German bombing of Belfast, we had no defence and planes came over for hours in two raids, over 1,500 civilians were killed. I was a corporal in the Home Guard then.

What do you think of the UK today, and are you happy or unhappy with how the country has turned out since the war?

No, I am not at all happy with the state of the UK as a whole. Our Politicos (of all parties) have let us down badly. Laws have been passed which are leading to chaos. The Internet is proving to be a curse for both young and old. Criminals and drug dealers are not dealt sufficient punishment. We should not have gone to war in Iraq or Afghanistan, which has been a grave yard for the British Army since the 1800's. We should have continued with National Service.

Best Wishes

Tom Carter

(Via email!)

Hi! Nick

Which Battalion was your Great Uncle (hope that's the right description) with? I was a WW2 Green Howard from 1940 to 1946, now 87 years of age, what can I tell you?

Regards Wilf Shaw

Hi! again Nick , sorry to be long winded at answering you, I go out and about every single day, I'll be 88 next birthday (6th Feb). To try and answer your email letter point by point, I wasn't in 1st Battalion , I was , along with many more conscripted in 1940, did about 3 months basic training at Plumer Barracks Plymouth with the York and Lancaster Regiment, A list went up one day asking for certain men to train as specialists, i.e. signallers, transport drivers, carriers, mortar personnel, etc, I had been in the Territorials before the war, first with the Lancashire Fusiliers, then the Manchesters, always as a signaller, so I put my name down for Signals, not long afterwards we were posted up to Richmond, Yorkshire, and ended up at a place by the name of Aske Hall, which, it turned out, was for specialists only.

We were put in the stable's (the horse stalls) no horses there at that time incidentally. All the stalls had the name of the horse over it that previously occupied it, (we were two

men to a stall). The name over our stall was ""Farmer", the bloke in the stall with me said to me on taking up residence, " I can imagine that horse, all bollocks and backbone". We trained there for about the next 3 months, doing signal training day after day, sending and reading morse code by a variety of means , field telephone, lamp DLSR (daylight signalling short range), Morse by waving one flag(not semaphore), Heliograph, a thing called a Fullerphone and R/T by No 18 set , a sort of mobile phone , I'll try and send you a photo of one by attachment, line laying and line maintenance, until the day came when we were sent down to Frome in Somerset, to the " 6th Battalion The Green Howards", and I served with them until the 13th of June 1946 (Thursday). I was called up on the same day and date 1940, (how's that for a coincidence). well! That's a brief resume of things, there's a lot more if you're interested, both in things I have written and the photographs I still have, any of which I can attempt to pass on to you by way of attachments,

So sad about your great uncle, I well remember the time in Sicily. As a 1st Battalion soldier, your great uncle would have been a part of 5 Div, and landed to our right, I was with 50 Div, which had 2 battalions of Green Howards , 6th and 7th Battalions , 3 Battalions of Durham Light Infantry 6th 8th and 9th, and 1 Battalion of East Yorks the 5th, that only made 2 brigades, 69th and 151 Brigades, the other Brigade 150 had all been either killed , wounded or captured by Erwin Rommels, Axis forces in the previous year at the battle of Knightsbridge on the Gazala Line. (I guess a lot of this will sound all double dutch to you Nick).

Anyhow I'll get this off to you just to see if you want me to go on, let me know Nick, oh! by the way Nick, your great uncle would be in the same Battalion as Hedley Verity, a Yorkshire cricketer who played for England many, many times, and I've a feeling Douglas Jardine was also a Green Howard. He captained England in the years previous to the 2nd World War, Hedley Verity was killed in Sicily by the way.

Have to knock off for now Nick I'm feeling tired 88 next you know , I know you will understand,

Let me know if you're interested,

Yours for the present Wilf Shaw.

Hi! Nick

Such a lot to tell you I hardly know where to start. I'll just have to keep sending things a bit at a time and eventually you'll be able to form some kind of picture, about me and about things in general. I think a good start is to send you this photograph of the lads I served with right from the word go, You remember I told you about Aske Hall in late 1940 and how we trained as Signallers?, well these are the lads who went with me down to Marston House near Frome in Somerset. First I'll identify them all, back row L to R , Tommy Parker, could still be alive and , I think in Middlesbrough, Henry Jefferies from Bethnal Green, London,

Wilf Shaw from Oldham in Lancashire, as you well know, (still alive but not kicking as well as I used to), Larry Latham from Manchester area, Stan Palmer from Ripponden Near Halifax West Yorkshire, Front Row L to R Laurie Abnett- London, James Wilson-

Billinge near St Helens Lancashire, Morris Hancock- Darlington, Billy Wright- Worborough Bridge South Yorkshire, There should have been a tenth man on the photograph but he was unavailable at the time, This was Maurice Sutherland from Yarm in Cleveland, (Knighted after the war).

Only 7 of those on the photograph went abroad with the Battalion in 1941, Latham and Abnett were left in England.

James Wilson was killed in action at the Wadi Akarit in Southern Tunisia, on the 6th of April 1943. Morris Hancock was taken prisoner in the retreat from Gazala to Alamein (he died a few years back), Stan Palmer died only last year, he only lived about 10miles from me, I used to pop over and see him on odd occasions, Jefferies, like myself came through it all, I went down to Bethnal Green to see him after the war but sadly lost touch with him afterwards, Bill Wright I found out died a few years ago, and that's about it, so you'll be able to place faces to names whenever I mention them in any future correspondence.

I'll leave it at that for now Nick and get this off to you and , hopefully manage to attach the photograph successfully.

Cheers for now , Wilf

Hi! again Nick , sorry I've been absent for a while,

Yes ! I explained in an email reply to you that the few days we spent at Durban were just wonderful, and that a few days later we boarded the Mauritania and sailed up the east coast of Africa and into the Red Sea, unfortunately, I got to near the end of a quite lengthy email when suddenly everything disappeared, I couldn't get it back, it was lost, sorry about that. Yes! you are correct in your assumption that we were on our way to the Middle East, We disembarked from the Mauritania at Port Tewfik in Egypt, then transported to a place by the name of Quassasin, what a bloody awful place it was. Within days scores of us went down with dysentery and sand fly fever. The flies, the most persistent in the world, never left you alone for a second, to this day I feel sick whenever I think about the place. I'll get this off to you now ,I feel apprehensive in case this disappears too, will try and write you more over the weekend, in the meantime here's another photo or two.

All the best for now Nick
Wilf Shaw

Hi! Nick , Let me know whether the enclosed diary entry is capable of being read, if it is I can send you many more , it's just one of many, I'm going to cook a nice piece of smoked cod for my evening meal now, be with you again soon.

Harry - My Mother's Youngest Brother

Born in 1913, Harry was the youngest member of my grandparent's family. His life seemed beset with one problem after another, mostly women and drink,- he had 4

children, 2 of them with another women other than his wife. It was Harry I went to live with at South Yardley in Birmingham, 1939. I worked at the same firm as him, THE PARKINSON STOVE COMPANY, in the foundry. It was the dirtiest job I ever did in my working life, there was no washing or shower facilities at the firm. We had to walk it, the three miles home as the bus companies would not allow us to travel on the buses because of the dirt.

Harry's job was knocking the red hot casting out of the moulding boxes which moved along on a conveyor belt, my job was to brush off all the black sand. It was dirty, the foundry and castings were red hot, it was mid summer. I hated the job. Harry came to see me when I was in 106 South African Hospital, near Alexandria after being wounded in El Alamein in 1942. Harry died suddenly at work as a gravedigger in Royton Cemetery on the 13th Jan, 1977. He is buried with his mother, father and sister; Margaret and Lily (my mother).

Joe Bainbridge & Crown & Anchor

It was during the voyage up to North Africa that I made acquaintance of Joe Bainbridge. Joe ran a Crown & Anchor board every day on the deck of the ship. I helped collect the money in after the winning bets had been paid out.

Crown & Anchor was a square piece of cloth divided into six equal squares. In each square was the printed symbol of each of the suits in a pack of cards i.e. spade, club, heart and diamond. The other two squares had a ships anchor and a crown. These coincided with similar symbols on the six sides of three dice. A cup was placed over the dice and they were given a good shuffling around, then the gathered assembly of players staked their money on a symbol on the cloth. The cup was lifted to reveal the upturned dice faces, those successful would be paid out, even money if one correct, two to one if two, and three to one if three. Joe used to have the assembly in uproar with a never ending stream of witty conversation. At the end of every game he would pick up all the loose change and hurl it sky-wards for the punters to scramble for.

Hi! Nick ,

I have included another photograph with this email, it was taken more than 70 years ago when I was just a 17 year old lad in the territorials, The 10th Battalion The Manchester Regiment based here in Oldham, A few years later I was in a real war in The Western Desert. The equipment my mate and I are using went by the name of DLSR (Daylight Signalling Short Range), we never used it in the 2nd World War, The lad with me was George Cowel , he died in Japanese hands after being taken prisoner. Hope you and yours OK , Cheers for now.
Wilf

Hi! again Nick,

You asked about the funny the tragic and the memorable, the attached diary entry , if not the funniest , must rank pretty highly amongst quite a few more, hope it

tickles your fancy.

Rained here all day, went out as usual though with Harry my mate , dry stick, Harry. I just happened to remark to him in conversation the other week, " We have to be thankful at our stage of life, you cant expect to live forever, I know , he said , and I'll bloody miss you when you're gone!" That's all for the time being, just wanted to send you the diary entry, Hope you and yours all keeping well.

Wilf

Jeff & Flossie

From the limited amount of research I have been able to carry out, it would appear that Marston House was built about 1600, with other extensions built in 1751 and 1820. These facts would have been of little interest to the new intake of signal recruits, allocated to the 6th Green Howards in the early winter of 1941. Ten of us were allocated a room on the top floor, into which had been placed half a dozen huge bunk beds, constructed of heavy 3 inch timber with hessian nailed across to form an upper and lower bunk. I made a terrible choice when I picked the first bunk near the door, which I found out to my cost a couple of times when the orderly sergeant made a surprise second visit after reveille. In the bed on the top bunk right next to mine slept Henry Jeffries, about five foot five in height and no more than 9 1/2 stone in weight. He had a girlfriend in London by the name of Flossie. I many times smile to myself with amusement when I think of Jeff and those early days at Marston House, "Cor! Gerra load o this!" he would say, addressing all and sundry. What we were being implored to "Gerra load of", was an erection which truly belied his 9 1/2 stone. Then his arms were flung up imploringly to heaven and his penis proud and erect pointing in the same direction. "Why don't ya cam walkin through that fackin door Flossie and sees wot av got fer ya?" Flossie didn't come walking through the door, but - the orderly sergeant did, and Jeff, from a posture which had been more akin to that of a prancing Dervish, was now more that of a Moslem praying to Mecca, and his proud manliness was fast starting to survey the floor, rather than the heavens he had been praying so passionately to.

Jeff was from a poor quarter of Bethnal Green, and as Maurice Sutherland said in a letter to me just after Christmas, "he was a born thief" there was another side to Jeff though. This kind of thing in 1941 went a long way towards relieving boredom and homesickness. We knew we were soon to be boarding a troopship for overseas and an uncertain future.

Dear Mr Pringle

I read your letter in a recent issue of the Yorkshire Press, with regards to veterans who served in the last war. I am now 83 years of age and was in the R.A.O.C for a while before being transferred to Combined Operations at Warnford Park in the heart of the Meon Valley of Hampshire. I spent almost 6 years in the forces and finally

ended my service in Cairo before being sent to Suez where I helped to document incoming U.K drafts. My rank throughout my service was a humble Private.

From being conscripted, I went to initial training in Manningham Lane, Bradford - (later the notorious Ripper country). Henceforth to Saltburn for a short course before being posted to an ordnance depot at Greenford in Middlesex.

My first memories of London were the giant hoardings proclaiming - 'Kit Kat, The Biggest Littlest Breakfast in London' and - 'If It's Laughter You're After, Trinder's the Name.' Emerging from the Leicester Square tube station for the first time, into Theatreland; The Warner, The Empire and Ritz cinemas and Gone With The Wind, that mighty epic that stayed in the West End throughout the war and was as much a part of London as Big Ben and Jellied Eels.

London under the dark cloak of the blackout; under the arches, the huddled, crumpled lumps of humanity in their own twilight world, oblivious to everything under their newspaper blankets. I was struck by the 'massiveness' of the City and its vulnerability, torn apart by the Blitz. I walked into the City, deserted in its pinstripe darkness. The City, centre of London's business world. The Thames, a silently flowing spread of water, silvered by the light of a bomber's moon. For me, an impressionable eighteen year old who had never strayed far from his native Yorkshire, the feeling of isolation overwhelmed me. I felt lost in the vastness of it all, but the feeling was compensated for by the excitement of being there. I walked through most of the early night, hugging London by my bosom, reluctant to let it go. Because of the war, there was a resolve stemming from a common aim. A white hot heat of the spirit burned through the nation. The togetherness that war had brought to the people was much in evidence. Cockney humour prevailed amongst the rubble and the suffering, a bitter sweet combination that Hitler could not destroy.

All this was long ago but I still remember it. How times have changed, not always for the better. You ask for opinions of today. If I had known what this country would become when I was in the forces, I would have been inclined to surrender (I say this with tongue in cheek). We are in a 'dog-bite-dog' world where the first bite counts. In my opinion one of the major problems that besets this country is one of over population. For our size, we are one of the most populated countries in the world and this brings with it many problems four housing, schools and the Health Service. We have allowed the flood gates to open on immigration and we have become a soft touch for many foreigners. In my opinion we need a strong government to clamp down on the influx of immigrants but I doubt there is a party prepared to clutch the nettle. Politicians should take the line that Australia has taken and this can be readily obtained from its website.

No, I am not happy with how my country has turned out for we are losing our identity, an opinion shared by one or two of my veteran friends. There was a case the other day of a young Romanian girl and her boyfriend, both arriving in the U.K without passports. She has no intention of returning to Romania. Her life is not in danger. They have both been given clothes, accommodation, and £45 per week. Crime is widespread with murders and muggings commonplace. Before the war such crimes were very rare. We fought the last war to preserve our freedom and our way of life. We have freedom

of a sort but our way of life is not the same. It is now a different country to the one I knew in 1940. I am not a racist but mixed cultures in a small country never work satisfactorily.

With regard to the war itself, I lost a few comrades in the D-Day landings. I was on a draft to go over on D-Day plus one but was taken off the draft by the powers that be and posted back to my depot because I was needed as a touch typist and, apparently, male typists did not grow on trees in the Army. I regretted not going over but - the roll of the dice! My days at Warnford Park were rewarding. We were stationed approximately 15 miles from Portsmouth and I had, from time to time, to go to the port where one could see hundreds of landing barges and boats of all kinds preparing for the invasion. Winston Churchill and many service heads met at Droxford, close to Warnford, and I remember we were all confined to barracks whilst they were there. The roads and lanes of Hampshire were crowded with tanks, lorries and other vehicles slowly making their way to the coast. My depot helped to equip the L.C.O.C.U's (Landing Craft Obstruction Clearing Units) and also equipped the Royal Marine Commandoes, some of whom I understand landed on the French coast under darkness some many months earlier to test the beaches for their suitability for tanks etc. and not a shot was fired.

After the war, the ex-servicemen did not have as raw a deal as they did after WW1. Nevertheless, they did not come home to 'a land fit for heroes to live in'. This was partly due to the bankrupted state we found ourselves in and we have only recently paid off our war debt to the U.S.A. I settled down to life in civvies street without much difficulty, although I missed the comradeship. It took me sometime, however, to get used to sleeping in a soft bed again. I went back to my job in the N.H.S where I continued to work until my retirement at the age of sixty.

I seem to have rambled somewhat; I saw no action and, like many other conscripts, led a comparatively uneventful service career but with hindsight, I would not have missed it for the world. I went in a callow youth and like to think I came out a man. It was the finest training for life and the youth of today are the poorer for not experiencing service life - but we don't want another war! However, if one wants to look into the future, read history, it has a habit of repeating itself.

Yours Sincerely
C Elliker

Dear Nick Pringle

At the age of 88, I decided to reply to your letter in our Western Morning News. I am pleased to have a chance to speak on behalf of my friends still in Normandy after clashing with the 12th S.S Hitler Youth Panzer Division, leading Guards Armoured Division and the 11th Armoured Division in the breakout of the Second Army, Normandy Bridgehead.

I have to say that I regard the general situation of Britain today to be in a grave

situation which could lead to the collapse of our country. Law and order has broken down and the House of Commons and Government seem to be impotent to stop these terrible UNPROVOKED attacks on innocent people. We need to follow the advice of the Rt. Hon. Enoch Powell on Europe, immigrants and asylum seekers PROMPTLY before it really becomes too late. We do not want to be subjected to people we do not elect i.e. Europeans.

It will not be long before immigrants equal us in number in our own country and I am sure the boys of Bomber Command RAF and Fighter Command RAF who died, would say they did not fight to be ruled by Europeans - trade yes, friends yes, but no more. I was privileged to see Bomber Command and Fighter Command in action and greatly admired their work helping us on the ground to make progress.

Britain is in big trouble and I would like to see UKIP have a say in Westminster about things as soon as possible! I have to say I fear the worst, however, and that Enoch Powell was our best man and had big support in the UK. He was, however, given a big honour, a 'lying in state in Westminster for 24 hours when dead.'

I am, of course, very sad at the state of our lovely Britain today, but I can assure you, I have for the past 37 years done all I can for what I believe in.

My family hold the M.C, D.C.M and M.M, they were soldiers of long service around World War 1.

Yours Sincerely

Derek Blanchard

(An enclosed copy of a letter from Buckingham Palace replying to Mr Blanchard's concerns about the EU)

Dear Nick

I found it encouraging to know that the views of the elderly are still of interest.

Britain introduced its first peacetime conscription in June 1939 for all aged twenty. I was called up for supposedly 6 months which eventually morphed into well over 6 years! I was a corporal in the RAMC serving in France (Sept 39/40 - Dunkirk) and on the D Day Landings, then Belgium, Holland and Germany. Demobbed 1946.

DUNKIRK

I was on the beach with a mate of mine, an ex miner from Durham, for 6 days. In that time the scene changed from looking like Blackpool on a Bank Holiday to being now almost deserted. We'd slept in the sand dunes at night and couldn't get a ship as our officers had left us a week previously on the Belgian border.

It was a beautiful morning and the sea was calm. I suggested that we swim out to a cargo boat newly arrived some 300 yards offshore. Agreed, we stripped off and went down to the water's edge. The water was cold - when I looked back my mate had not moved. Yes, you've guessed the response I got. "I can't swim"!!! We gave up hope

then and that night slept in one of the ambulances beached by the sea and normally shunned as being targets for the Stuka bombers. We were so tired we lost the will to be afraid. Paradoxically we were picked up the next morning by H.M Destroyer Harvester sent to gather stragglers. I think it was June 1st - the Germans arrived on the 3rd.

Regarding the main thrust of your letter, I suppose the beliefs of the men who never returned would be rather similar to we survivors - only even more so. At least we have had a gradual acclimatising to the huge social and economic changes that have taken place - especially over the past decade or so.

Changes - the plus side must feature the diminution of deference. Although the class system still operates young people are not overawed by it and, consequently, it has lost much of its power. People are infinitely more prosperous (eg clothes, cars, holidays abroad, home ownership, etc.) I remember the fifties as a young teacher wearing my one suit (Army issued) weekdays and the luxury of a sports jacket and flannels at the weekend. As a single man then I enjoyed one night at the local, a cinema visit and a soccer or rugby games on Saturdays. The point was that everyone was poor.

Education has made vast progress. In my early days I taught classes of fifty. Discipline was keen and parents backed the school (not so today). I left school in 1935 aged 16. I had a good matriculation but no hope of university as my wage was needed at home. I was able to teacher train after the war under the government scheme. Only 5% of children went on to further education compared with over forty today. Also must feature is emancipation of women with the introduction of the pill a huge contributor. It's hard to believe that prewar, women teachers were dismissed as soon as they married!

People say what they want today - and a good thing too. I well remember my father (an office worker) being told that if he wished to keep his job not to bring the Daily Herald with him to work! There is a much enlarged middle class now and the progress in the world of IT would be stupefying to old comrades today. I think the creation of the European Union would appeal to them if only for the reason of maintaining the peace in Europe over the past 60 years or so.

Changes - the debit side. I think 'the fallen' would be appalled by several features of modern life. The lack of manners, the worshipping of celebrities, the gradual fragmentation of our liberties for anti terror reasons, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, litter, the patent dishonesty of politicians and the power of the press now able to influence the governments decisions. The fact that most citizens seem to manage to live in a constant condition of debt. We were, of course brought up to believe that if you hadn't the money - you waited till you had! A small but interesting point, I believe, is the death of 'melody'. My generation were raised on the big bands and found the 'birth of the groups' rather shocking. However one could still hum tunes written then. I wonder if youngsters can today?

All in all things are undoubtedly much better today and I think old comrades would agree with that. If they were asked if the world at large were better, poverty in the Third World, Aids, Climate Change - I'm not so sure.

All good wishes in your task.
Sincerely
Roy H Powell

Dear Mr Pringle

I have read your letter in our local paper 'What do you think?' I was only a very small cog in WWII and not a very good one. I was called up in Jan 1944 - Signaller, Royal Corps of Signals. After intensive training I landed on Mulberry Harbour, France in Oct 1944. We moved through France into Belgium, stationed in Brussels for a few weeks and then onto Antwerp to relieve the Canadian Army Signals. During this time we were living rough, beds were a thing of the past and I wouldn't have fed the food to the pigs. In Antwerp, a large city, we had no laundry or bathing facilities and had to do the best we could to keep clean.

At this time Jerry was doing his best to knock out the port and we were bombed day and night with V1's and V2's. We had a number of our mates killed and billets knocked out. In spite of this we were reasonably happy. We were all in the same boat and it was always someone else that was going to buy it, that is, you're indestructible. Some of us stayed on until the port closed down for the military and then moved up into Holland. I never want to see that country again. We found the Dutch a miserable lot of bastards, they only wanted our money and the police and border guards were like a bunch of Nazis. I eventually married a Belgian girl and got a posting back to Brussels. I stayed until I got demobbed in 1947.

The country I came back to wasn't the country I left to fight for. Some things never change, the Commies came into power in Aug '45 under Atlee. 'Vote us in, we'll get you out.' they said. Two years later we were still in. When I got back my wife and I couldn't find anywhere to live and had to live with parent's or grandparent's. Eventually we were given half of a plasterboard hut in an old PoW camp. There we had to stay for six years before we were given a flat in town. We were there two or three years when a builder from Leicester started to build an estate and with help from my parents I bought the house I still live in. That was in 1962, my wife died 17 years ago. We didn't have a holiday for 15 years. It was a struggle to buy the house and give our two son's a good education.

How do I feel about the country today? My two uncle's gave their lives for this country, my father's health was broken from gas in WW1. I did my little bit, my brother did his national service in the Canal Zone in Egypt. What has been our reward? EVERYTHING we fought for has been taken from us and given to foreigners, we are now third rate citizens in our own country. Our enemies rule us from Brussels and we are being colonized by ***** and ***** in this country. There is not one political party that is prepared to stand up and fight for our country and indigenous population. The holocaust is now being carried out on us. What are my main regrets? That I didn't fight for Hitler, at least he was for his own people.

Many of us that are now left have a saying 'Bombed, shelled and shot at and

now shit on.' and that sums it up. When I came out the Army I
***** , now I wish I could ***** that whole rotten
pigsty called Parliament and the traitors in it. 82 and full of anger, not a very nice way
to come to the end of your days, is it? I worry about the future of what was once my
country and the fate of my grandchildren.

Yours Sincerely
T.W Earl

Dear Mr Pringle

I was very interested in your letter in the local newspaper and am delighted to
give you an opinion of this country in 2008.

During the war, as a young lad, I served in the Civil Defence as a Messenger
Boy (bike provided) to keep community lines open where the phone lines were
dismantled by the bombings. I then moved up to Air Raid Warden up until I got called
up and joined the Army, rather than be sent down the coal mines as a Bevin Boy,
(named after the Minister of Labour, Ernie Bevin).

Our family was like many others, bombed out twice and given shelter in a local
school hall, not a very nice experience, but this was all part of the horrors of war, a war
that WE declared on Germany to support Poland from Nazi oppression. Now the Poles
have invaded us, at least 1.5 million since 2006. Which brings me to your next point on
whether I am disappointed or happy about how the country has turned out in 2008. I
couldn't be more unhappy, especially as, in the last 11 years, we have had a Labour
Government, who I had great faith in after 18 years of Tory misrule and who started so
well and brought many benefits to the people, but then after a few years the Labour left
wingers and do gooders started to get their own way and Blair went back to what he
used to be and they got their own way.

We thought that when the war was over that was it, but in the last 10 years dear
Tony has involved our country in unwinnable wars costing thousands of lives and
billions of pounds, and in the process made himself a millionaire and left the country to
earn more and let us get on with it. Then there's the scandal of the non existent
immigration policy, whereby the Govt have opened up the borders to all and sundry
from all over the world, including the aforementioned Poles to complete this invasion of
our, what was, a lovely country that we fought a 6 year war to preserve for ourselves
and our children. Life in the U.K will never be the same again. I cannot bring myself to
vote for the Tories after their last 18 year stint, so what's left? The BNP. At least it would
show as a protest vote, sad isn't it?

What our fallen comrades would make of 21st century Britain, I dread to think,
if they knew how, in spite of everything, the country has been invaded without a shot
being fired. The Govt has banned everything but the air we breath and we are still
fighting wars on behalf of other nations that have nothing to do with us, all because
Blair wanted to get into bed with Bush, as it turned out for his own financial ends. I feel

when I was younger I did what was required of me in the war and working all my life paid my dues and demands to the State, but what for? So the immigrants can invade our country and milk the system we fought so hard to get.

Yours Sincerely
Len Sargent

Dear Mr N Pringle

My name is Raymond Cotton aged 91. I enlisted in the Royal Corps of Signals, July 1935 rank Signaller Radio OP. Trained at Catterick, posted to Hong Kong 1937. (Mr Cotton received the official notification to Hong Kong, whilst on duty, that war had been declared on Germany, on September 3rd 1939. He had been due to return to the UK in 1940, but the outbreak of war meant his regiment were instructed to remain in Hong Kong.) Taken prisoner on Xmas Day 1941 when the country surrendered. Spent nearly four years as a guest of the Japanese in the Shamshuipo P.O.W camp till Dec 1943. Sent to Nogoya, 1945 sent to Toyoma, released by the Americans Sept 1945. I still live with those years of groups of pals (5). I was the only lucky one to get home.

It was such a different country to the one I left in '37. It took a long time to come to terms with life. There was no help- discharge, civvy suit and get on with it. There is a lot of good things about England and also bad things. I sometimes despair but on the whole it is still England. Summer is coming. Good luck to you all.

R D Cotton

(With the thank you letter I sent a few questions, Mr Cotton kindly replied.)

What are your memories of Christmas Day 1941 when you were first taken captive? Relief that killing was stopped. Uncertainty at what would happen next. *(Mr Cotton was recovering from a knee cartilage operation, when Japan launched their attack on Hong Kong. From the hospital window he could see Japanese fighter planes attacking the colony's defences. He was discharged with a walking stick and worked in an underground system on communications at Fortress HQ, until the surrender. His family back home, did not know what had happened to him after the fall of Hong Kong, until two years later.)*

How did you and your mates keep your spirits up during imprisonment? Firstly, we knew the Japs could not win this war, and a conviction to survive with the Middlesex Regiment. They were brilliant, always getting one up on the Japs.

Was disease a problem in the camps, were you personally affected? I had Beri Beri Pallegra, electric feet, strawberry balls ulcers. We had a Diphtheria outbreak and people were dying, 10-20 a day. At first the Japs laughed, said it was a childrens disease, then they got worried, made us all wear face masks and tried to count

us from 20 yds away, which was a complete disaster. My luck held I was a carrier.

Did you receive any cruel treatment or witness any by the Japanese guards and if so what?

There was daily beatings. If a Jap came behind you and you didn't see him you would get a bashing for not bowing.

Can you tell us a bit more about the the four friends you mention in your letter, what are your memories of them and what happened to them?

Alf Fleet (Grimsby) was killed on Dec 18th when the Japs landed on the Island at the Taiko Sugar Docks, body never found. H Dixon killed at Stanley 24th Dec, he came from Sidcup. Pip Cooke drowned on the Lisbon Maru (*The Lisbon Maru was a Japanese troop ship that was torpedoed by the Americans. Tragically they were unaware that deep below battened down in the ships holds were 1,850 P.O.W's being transported. The Japanese evacuated themselves to another ship leaving the P.O.Ws to their fate. After 26 hours many managed to escape the holds as the ship began to settle. No attempt was made to help the P.O.Ws from the sea, in fact some boats shot at them. Giving up hope of rescue many began to try and swim to nearby islands. By the end of the day a horrific 825 men had died on board the ship or in nearby waters. Mr Cotton was not included on the draft for this ship, from Shamshuipo Camp, as he was found to be a carrier of Diptheria.*) H Price, Glamorgan, survived the Lisbon Maru. Met him when it was over at Tokyo, got on a plane before me and went straight in the drink (Sea)...no survivors.

What are your most vivid memories of captivity?

The endless days of working and, in Shamshuipo, the finding of a radio and the execution of three officers involved. (*The POW's were made to stand in the heat of the day from 08.30 to 17.45, whilst the search took place.*) The horrendous journey from H.K to Japan, people who died on the voyage were just dumped over the side. (*The Toyama Maru, a Japanese troop carrier, took approximately 1,000 POW's to Japan, including 300 Canadians. The POW's were put in the bottom of the hull of the ship, and were kept in bamboo cages. They were forced to sit with their legs crossed, and there was not enough room to lie down.*)

What was your darkest moment during imprisonment?

When I had Dysentry. It was really touch and go, but I survived.

* Once the Japs had young Chinese prisoners, they wrapped them up in barbed wire and threw them against an electric fence as they had received some bad news in the war.

What was a typical day in the camps?

Reveille at 6am, 7am bowl of rice only, 7.30 am marched to the railway station onto 2 coaches for 300 men (if in last you were pushed in with rifle butts), taken to the factory (Mitsubishi Railway Factory), disembark, counted, all had to face the Emperors Palace (the compass point of it) bow to it, bow to civilian guards, marched into the factory. I

went into Lathe shop (the Churchill Lathe which all prisoners touched - a British link). Break at midday, nothing to eat, stayed to 5pm. Harold Bates and I collected iron fillings into a truck all day. It was exhausting. In afternoon, school kids joined us to work the lathes. 5pm marched to station, back to the camp (1 mile march) bowl of rice or cup of tea (headlamp of green tea) or weak soup - about 8pm. Sleep after 8pm, exhausted.

Never sat in a chair, never slept in a bed or saw a white woman for 4 years.

Names of Jap Soldiers - Goodfella, Californian Kid (could speak English), Fish Face, The Ugly Duckling
'The Pig' Colonel Tokunaga - Japanese officer commanding POW camps in Hong Kong.

1944 - Worst year - No air raids, felt isolated, despair.
1945 - 1st air raid.

Can you explain a bit more about the camps? eg. How many were prisoner, conditions, food etc.

Terrible, there was nothing, camps had mudfloors - 2 Tutamis together (2)" each man!, rice cooked in cookhouse, an electric light bulb, everyone's name put down for the burnt rice - only got it once! - 300 in my last camp (Toyama) all we talked about was food. Yasmi day - a day off once a month, allowed one hot bath - all got in - had to do what told - sometimes made to dance - regular beatings. (*Mr Cotton was also made to write essays on various subjects for the Japanese, but never worked out what they wanted them for.*)

How did you get from one camp to the other one, what was the journey like?
In Nagoya transferred to Toyama by train with civilians (given a basic ration 5in x 3in 1in deep, rice with white turnip, dried fish) pleasant, had a seat, travelled with civilians.

Are there any funny stories / light hearted memories amongst all the dark ones and what are these?

Not in Japan, with Middlesex Regiment at Shamshuipo - they were more cheerful. 1st 3 months left to our own devices, it was easier until barbed wire electric fence were put up.

100 flies given a cigarette - the Jap collector didn't realise they were recycled all the time.

Did you have to work during captivity and what were you expected to do?
We worked every day. One Yasme day a month in the Mitsubishi Railway Factory, mostly cleaning iron fillings and loading onto railway trucks. (*Whilst working one day, Mr Cotton collapsed in exhaustion into the machinery. His upper arm was badly damaged and if it had not been for the quick actions of a young Japanese boy in the factory, who switched the*

machine off, he would have been killed. A POW medic carried out surgery, and used some metal clips from the factory to hold his skin together. On another occasion, a large earthquake took place, and Mr Cotton remembers, the ground opening up, the noise and huge cast iron train wheels and other heavy items flying through the air. The Japanese guards all fled towards the railway track, to lie across it, as the railway line would span any crevices made by the earthquake.)

Have you ever returned to the camps or war cemeteries in the Far East in the years after the war, if so did this help you?

I didn't get to any of the camps in Japan though I did spend 12 days in Japan paid for by the Japs. I also took two of my sons to H.K and toured the battlefields.

What would be your advice if any to people who find themselves in an adverse situation. What would you say is the best way to mentally overcome it?

To keep faith and the will to survive.

Your letter mentioned that your brothers fought in the war and also your father who served during WW1 and WW2, briefly what were there wartime experiences eg. what regiment, where did they serve?

All three were in the R.A.F. My youngest brother was a flight engineer and done his stint over Berlin. My father was discharged M.U.F in 42. My elder brother spent the war in stores in Egypt.

In your letter you explained that when you returned from war all the ex POW's just had to get on with it. Did you suffer any long term mental or physical problems because of your experience?

It took me a long time to get to terms with a new England. The greatest help I received was from my girlfriend from before the war, who I married. Far from war being glamorous, it is anything but.

Do you remember your day of liberation, and if so, what was it like?

The day of liberation was very confusing, some said the war was over and some not. It was only on the 16th August that we found all the camp guards had gone. *(In the last couple of weeks in captivity the POW's would hide in the adjacent vegetable fields with the Japanese to take cover from American bombing raids. After being found with stolen vegetables one day, the POW's were lined up and were beaten with wood taken from the fencing. Mr Cotton was at the end of the line, by the time they got to him they had run out of wood, so he got a good kicking instead. After the surrender, American planes would fly over the camp to send messages and drop food, cigarettes, magazines etc. One came to tell them to hang on in there, as help was on its way. The young American pilot, Paul H Henderson, then performed a victory roll salute, for the ecstatic POW's below, but tragically crashed after hitting electricity cables and was killed. The pilot's promise came true, and the POW's were found by U.S ground troops and they began a long, comfortable trip home, which included watching Gracie Fields perform in Manila, then by ship to Honolulu then San Francisco, then a rail trip across the American continent, then by*

ship from Nova Scotia, Canada to Southampton. After 8 long years, Ray Cotton finally arrived back home in Kent.)

Message dropped by American plane at 10.30am on the 2nd September 1945. ' HANG ON, JUST A FEW MORE DAYS, HELP IS COMING. WE HOPE TO SEE YOU ALL IN SAN FRANCISCO BEFORE LONG. DROP IN AT 869 BOMBER SQUADRON AND WE WILL HAVE A PARTY OR DROP A LINE TO CAPTAIN H.J WAGNER AND CREW OF A.P.O 237 C/O POSTMASTER SAN FRANCISCO. GOOD LUCK AND GOD SPEED YOU HOME.

Friends cried like babies for many had died by torture, starvation, lack of medicine and execution, but now American food, tobacco and news. It was indeed a great day for us all. Paul H Henderson paid for our joy with his life. Our grief was beyond expression. The sadness of this disaster, after peace, to a man bringing happiness to us struck to the core of men who had shown no emotion for years.

You mention in your first letter 'But it is still England' What are the things you love most about England?

The English people

You mention that you despair about some aspects of the country today. Is there any issues in particular that you are not happy with?

Yes, the number and type of immigrants flooding into this country. Who will be in charge in 50 years time?

The way of life altering so much.

I don't think I should write about what I really think.

Dear Mr Pringle

At the start of the war in 1939 I was just fourteen years old, and at the time I was a paper boy, delivering the 'Southern Daily Echo'. On September the 3rd when war broke out, I was cycling around the local streets selling the Daily Echo, this was only the second time in the paper's history that it had been sold on a Sunday!

In early 1942, before I was sixteen, I became a member of the Home Guard. After quite a lot of training, I was issued with an American automatic rifle. This fired 10 shots without having to use the bolt, this made it very easy to use.

After a year or so, some of us lad's were posted to the Anti Aircraft rocket site on the shore of the Solent at Netley, Southampton. (The rockets were about 6ft long, each launcher fired two rockets.) I left after Christmas 1943, to join the Army. In July 1944, I had two weeks leave. After my leave, along with another driver who became a

very good friend, by the name of Tim Kemp, from London, we were both posted to a transit camp in Bordon, Hampshire. After a few weeks we were on our way to France, and arrived at Arromanches on the French coast. We stopped there for a few days before driving our lorries along the coast to a chateau near Caen.

After a week or so in Burg-Leo'pold, Tim Kemp and myself were at last posted to our units we both went up to Nijmegen on the Rhine in Holland. We were posted to the 'Kent' 582 Coy. Field Engineers. The day after we arrived Tim was given an American armoured car to drive the major in, and I had a jeep to drive the captain around. At the time we arrived the sappers were ferrying troops across the Rheine, also ferrying them back after their re-draw from Arnhem.

As most of the rivers in Northern Europe were in flood in the winter of 44-45, it was quite a challenge to build Bailey bridges of any length! When the Bailey bridge was first designed it was only made to go across gaps of about 80ft, such as rail and road bridges that had been destroyed. I must say our company had the technique off to a fine art. You could always tell the bridges we built, as on the approach to all our bridges was a sign, 'WHY SLOW DOWN, STEP ON IT!' Owing to the flooding, most bridges had to be built 50 to maybe 100 yards either side of the river. Thus, making the bridges anything up to maybe 600 yards long or more. I used to have a lot of sympathy for the poor sappers. Their work was very hard, and under wet and cold conditions. They could be called from their beds at any time of the night, to adjust the anchor ropes on the pontoons, so as to keep the bridge in a straight line. (Each bridge that was built was given a name. This bridge was named 'Kent Bridge')

While I was awaiting at the approach to the bridge some civilian with a car wanted to go across, but his car would not start, so asked me to give him a push with my jeep. I pushed him up the ramp onto the bridge, but when we got onto the bridge, my front bumper bar was locked into his rear bumper, so I had to push him all the way across the bridge to Holland. After that I would always tell the lads I pushed a car all the way from Belgium to Holland!

The bridge we had just built was very vital at the time, to get all the heavy transport tanks etc, up into Holland ready for the push into Germany. They did say that on the first two days of open, some 24,000 vehicles and tanks crossed the bridge. A job well done.

At the next bridge being built for the Canadians (Quebec Bridge), the first trouble they had was the concrete mixer they were using broke down. The sparking plug had packed up, so I was sent to the nearest transport spares unit with a corporal to get a new one. We must have gone about a hundred miles to several spares units without luck. We were a couple of miles from a depot when we could hear a very low, Doodlebug 'flying bomb flying overhead. We could not see it, but knew that as long as the engine kept going we were OK. When we arrived at this factory, much to our surprise, this flying bomb had landed on a small chapel, and by the blood on the floor, someone had been badly hurt.

We had been issued with armless leather bodywarmers. The Coy. sign-writer, started to write the names of the lads or nicknames on the front of the jackets. I had mentioned to the lads I had been in the Home Guard, much to my surprise, when I got

back the sign-writer had written on the front 'HOME GUARD HARRY' and that name stuck. I've been called Harry ever since!

In January '45 we moved down to Gemert in Holland to build a bridge on the Mass, at a place called Mook. This was another long bridge over flood plains, just behind the front lines. When the bridge was finished it was called 'Ilex'. Our next rush job was to go up to Venlo in Holland, near the German border. It had only been taken a day or so before we arrived. We were stationed in a convent, it was so quiet, the nuns never made a sound. When you were walking in the corridors, you never knew if one was coming around the corner. One memory I have of the nunnery was all the young children's graves between the rose bushes in the garden. They had been killed during the heavy fighting and shelling of Venlo. Wherever you went around the district there was shell shrapnel in the roads.

My great surprise was on the morning of the 23rd March '45. I climbed out of my dug out to go for breakfast, only to be told with a great lot of excitement that we had crossed the Rhine during the night. The sappers started to assemble the bridge as the attack started, and as soon as the far bank was occupied, started to push the bridge across, at 3am in the morning. At 4pm in the afternoon, after just 13 hours the bridge was across and ready to use. What an achievement that was when you think, because of the flooding and high water, the bridge was 500 yards long. Surely that had to be a record, all without the Germans knowing. (This bridge was named Sparrow Bridge, after Sapper Sparrow who drowned during its construction.)

The following day I had to go across the bridge to a forward unit to collect some spares. The sight, I have never forgotten, was a very large number of huge 'Horsa' troop carrying gliders (The Horsas were used at both Operation Market Garden at Arnhem and Operation Varsity, (the crossing of the Rhine.) They had a crew of 2, could carry 25 troops and had a wing-span of 88ft/26.8m). They had crash landed everywhere, in the fields, at the side of the road, and even two in a canal. One made a perfect landing in a field and then stopped less than 10ft from the back door of a farmhouse. What a sight that was!

The war came to an end on May 8th, '45. I well remember being on parade in Bremen, outside the hotel to listen to Churchill's speech at 11am. Just after our midday meal we were all very busy cleaning. So, Major Keeble had us going back to his pre-war army, all spit and polish? Before the German hotel people had left, they had buried all their spirits in the back garden. Lucky for us, one of our motor mechanics working in the garden saw the fresh earth, and to his great surprise found the spirits. What a night we had that night, but very sore heads the next day!

Just after the war had finished, one of the strange things that puzzled me was the way the German police acted. Often if we were out and we passed they would salute us. Sitting in the side of the grass would be groups of German soldiers, they would stand up and salute us. I found this most strange.

One of the sappers I knew 'Ginger' always seemed to be in another world. I happened to mention this to a friend. Then he told me "I know, Ginger has never been the same since his brother was killed." Gingers brother was on a tank during the war doing mine clearance when the glycerine blew up.

One of the best moves I made in Germany was one Saturday night I went to the Coy. dance in the Stadt Hall. I had no partner, but when they played the last waltz I asked a young girl dressed all in white for a dance, she accepted. Her name was Anna. Along with her friend I walked her home, where she was staying with her married sister.

As to what I think of Britain today. I always remember the saying at the end of the war. We will return to a land "fit for heroes", but I'm afraid it has become a land only fit for yobs. Today we have no respect for anything. Going back to my childhood, graffiti was unknown. You could leave anything anywhere and you would be sure it would be there when you returned. But today, everything is chained to the ground. Even at our local cemetery the seating provided for mourners is chained to the ground. Our local shops have to put down steel shutters every time they close. What a very sad state we have got to. Our local bus stop with six seats built into the shelter, in less than three months two seats were completely ripped out of their fittings. The glass panels in the shelter were often smashed so they were replaced with plastic, but this does not stop the yobos from burning holes in the plastic with their cigarette lighters. I could go on but it depresses me how things have changed. You cannot have a good society without discipline, my young days and the Army taught me this. Look how things have gone since we did away with the cane at school and punishment of any kind. No wonder things are as they are.

There is now talk of teaching sex education to 5 year olds. How wrong must that be! When I was 5 years old children came from under gooseberry bushes, as the saying goes "Ignorance is bliss" How true! We have also taken away the shame of having a child before marriage. In my young days that would be disgraceful. Today sex is just another form of pleasure, without the love or romance of our time.

Society has much to be ashamed of, for all our lack of any form of morals. You only have to look at the present day films and television to see how low we have sunk. This is not only my view, most of my age group have the same feeling. Sadly, I could go on forever, but I can't see us ever getting back to our old standards of life.

On a more cheerful note, may I end by saying, Anna, the girl I met at the Hamlyn (Germany) Saturday dance in June 1947 is still my dear wife! We have been married 58 years with two children, a boy and a girl, 5 grand children and seven great grandchildren, with one due any day now.

Yours Truly
Arthur Hanlon,
Driver - 'Royal Engineers'

Dear Mr Pringle

The crew had formed up at O.T.U RAF Market Harborough. The flight engineer had joined us as H.C.U Wigsley. After our training together in the early part of 1944 we

had jelled into an excellent crew, each member was totally confident of the commitment and ability of the team as a whole.

After attending the Operational Training Unit and the Heavy Conversion Unit the air crew was posted to join No. 207 Squadron in June 1944. Our first operation was a daylight low level attack to breach the dykes on Walcheren Island at the mouth of the Scheldt estuary, (Between Belgium and Holland.) Although at this time the port of Antwerp had been freed by the British Army the port could not be brought into use because enemy guns were situated on the north shore, which dominated the estuary and shipping was not able to enter the river.

Our Lancaster's flying at low level, in daylight and using delayed action bombs breached the dykes on Walkern Island, thereby flooding the gun sites and rendering them useless. Meanwhile the Royal Marine Commandos landed further along the north shore and secured large bridge heads to neutralise the enemy. The estuary was thereby opened up to shipping and supplies were shipped directly to Antwerp rather than through the Mulberry Harbour in Normandy, and the long land haul.

Our Air Crew were allocated a new Lancaster Bomber recently delivered to the squadron. We looked upon this plane as a very lucky aircraft. Although we had been through some very heavy flak and the plane had returned with flak holes in the fuselage and wings no vital point was ever hit!

In late November, I was promoted to flight sergeant and soon afterwards we attacked the railway sidings at Frankfurt. Reconnaissance had shown the sidings full of trains loaded with armaments for the German armies in the west. This was the time just after the 'Battle of the Bulge' when German forces had counter attacked through the Ardennes. The operation was successful, as no doubt we inflicted much damage on the sidings and trains with their supplies.

On December 6th, 1944, we were briefed for an operation to attack Geissen near Frankfurt, as it was on a train line by-passing Frankfurt and the enemy were using this route to take war material to the forces at the front in the west.

The squadron had been practicing a new method of attack. It had been noted that on bombing raids a feature called 'creep back' had effected the accuracy of bombings. This meant that each successive wave of aircraft attacking a target tended to drop their bombs short of the target, hence the term 'creep back'. In an attempt to rectify this defect, we had been practicing a new technique. The Pathfinders were to mark NOT the target but a point at half past four or five o'clock from the target centre. Aircraft were to carry out the usual bombing run on the false target, but as the air bomber said the words 'Bombs going!' the pilot was to bring all engines to maximum revs and carry out a climbing turn to port. Thus throwing the bombs to the centre target.

After briefing on the afternoon of 6th December, 1944, I assisted the navigator in preparation of the flight plan for the night's operation. At briefing we were informed that the C.O (Wing Commander Black) had decided to take part in the operation. As C.O he had the choice of any aircraft in the Squadron and had chosen our aircraft. This sent a chill down our spines! We would not be flying our lucky plane that night but a veteran aircraft that was still in service with the squadron.

We took the crew bus to dispersal where the aircraft awaited us. I inspected the bomb bay and confirmed that the bomb load was as specified, incendiaries and a 4,000 block buster. The skipper carried out his usual external inspection of the aircraft. The aircrew entered the plane by the main door in the starboard side. The skipper carried out his cockpit drill and the engines were tested in sequence. The port inner engine was found to be slightly defective, as it would not hold high revs. The ground staff were summoned and the flight sergeant (engineer) worked on the engine to carry out the adjustments. The engine was started and checked. It was found to be satisfactory. We taxied to the end of the runway and took off at 16.52 hours.

The flight to Geisen was uneventful, with some small flack and searchlights over Holland. We sighted the target with the Pathfinders markers in place. There was heavy flack over Geisen, but none over the markers. We carried out a normal straight and level bombing run to the aiming point. As I said the words "Bomb going!" and pressed the bomb release button, the pilot revved up the engines and carried out a steep climbing turn to the port to throw the bomb at the target centre. There was a loud bang on the port side, I thought 'that bloody port engine has failed', but the skipper said 'That was an Ack-Ack shell.' The port inner engine caught fire. The skipper and flight engineer immediately feathered the propeller and pressed the fire buttons to extinguish the fire, but without success. The mid upper gunner from his advantage position reported the flames spreading to the wing.

The skipper then decided that the aircraft was doomed and gave the order "Jump, jump!" I had already affixed my Observer type parachute to the hooks on my chest harness. I immediately released the catches holding the escape hatch and attempted to jettison it. This did not go out as easily as it had done when practiced in the aircraft hangar during drill. The hatch went partly out but was caught in the slip-stream and jammed. I kicked it outwards and followed it, somersaulting through the opening. As I went out I could feel the feet of the flight engineer touching my back. I pulled my ripcord and soon felt the jerk as the parachute canopy took my weight. I watched the aircraft fly straight and level for an estimated five miles. I thought then that the skipper was struggling to keep the plane level to give all the crew members a chance to bail out. Most of the port wing was now ablaze. As I watched the port wing fell off, the aircraft turned on its port side and plunged to earth where it caused a loud explosion.

I found myself descending in complete silence after the noise and action in the aircraft. Unfortunately, I was swinging right to left and back again. I recalled instructions we had received to rectify this swinging motion. As I was swinging to the right I grasped the strands with my left hand and pulled. Unfortunately I found that this action did not effect the swinging motion at all, rather it partly collapsed the canopy. I found myself descending very rapidly and immediately released my left hand grip, preferring to go slowly even if swinging. I passed through a layer of stratus cloud. The night became even darker and I could not see the ground below me. The first indication I had that I was reaching ground level was when I fell through tree branches and eventually being held suspended from a large tree. I clambered onto a large branch and released my harness. We had been instructed that from the moment of reaching

ground, after bailing out, one had half an hour to conceal the parachute and start evasion. As I could not possibly conceal the canopy which was draped in the tree, I decided I would descend the tree as quickly as possible and scarper.

From the branch I found my way to the tree trunk and descended, branch by branch, until there was no more branches. The tree trunk was of small enough diameter for me to get a grip on it with my arms and legs. I slowly began to slide down. Unfortunately the girth of the tree got larger and I lost my grip and fell. I must have fallen about twenty feet. By bad luck there was a large rock near the base of the tree, and my right ankle struck it. I could feel my ankle turn and crack. I knew I had broken it. I tried to stand, but could not as the ankle was very painful. I therefore rested with my back against the tree and considered my situation.

I found that I was in a wood or forest on a steep hillside. In the valley below I could hear a railway shunting engine, huffing and puffing, as it moved the wagons about. Nearer to me I could hear running water from a mountain stream. I decided that evasion was now out of the question; my only option was to allow myself to be captured and receive medical attention. I therefore placed my damaged right ankle over my left one and slid down the hillside using my arms, bottom and left leg. I followed the stream in this fashion until about a mile down hill I came to a forest track with a small stone bridge over the stream. I managed to crawl onto the bridge and sat on the parapet.

In time I heard German voices in the woods, surrounding the bridge. Eventually I was hailed by a German voice. The only appropriate German word I knew in the circumstance was 'Kamerad' which I shouted in reply. Soon a number of young boys carrying rifles appeared. They were, I later came to know were the 'Volkstrum', similar to our own Home Guard. When they found that I was unable to walk they dispatched two of their number back along the road. They soon returned with a small motor van, into which I was bundled.

I was taken to a small army camp and into the guardroom near the gate. Two adult German officers then appeared and questioned me. I replied with my name, rank and number. They asked for my identification tags and removed them from around my neck. They then removed my Mae West jacket and flying suit and searched me. They found two Pound notes in my battledress pocket, they then removed my wrist watch and from my right wrist a silver identification bracelet which had been given to me in Toronto, Canada by a girlfriend there. This had engraved on it, my name and number, and an RAF crest. In my flying boots they found my escape maps and escape money, several hundred French Francs and German Marks. The officers made a great show of listing the items and placing them in a large brown envelope. They asked a further number of questions, which I did not understand, but answered with number, rank and name. They then locked me in a cell in the guardroom, where I spent the rest of an uncomfortable, cold night.

Early next morning two large German NCO's arrived to take me from the army camp. They had a French Citroen light 15 motor car painted in camouflage colours. I was helped into the back seat with my escorts and driven to a small railway siding where, with my escorts I was placed on a train. The train was a troop train full of

military personnel. I was given a seat and told the train was going to Frankfurt. After a short journey, we arrived at Frankfurt station. I was taken down the platform and into the canteen, which was run by elderly ladies (probably the equivalent of our W.R.V.S), but there was no cups of tea. Instead, it was very hot, potato soup flavoured with spices, very welcome on a cold December winter morning.

Whilst in the canteen I observed that opposite the entrance was a large photograph of Adolf Hitler in uniform. As German soldiers entered they stood to attention, clicked their heels and gave the Nazi salute, exclaiming in a loud voice 'Heil Hitler'. I thought it looked quite comical, and struggled to keep a straight face. My escort was approached by a German officer whom I later learned was a major. He wore the standard German Army uniform, but on his right wrist cuff was a ribbon inscribed with the words 'Afrika Korps'. He first spoke to my escort in German, and then addressed me in good English. He said that he was sorry that I was injured and that my escort was awaiting an ambulance to take me to Frankfurt hospital for treatment. As the officer spoke good English I took the opportunity to ask the fate of my crew mates. After speaking again to my escorts he informed me that only three parachutes had been seen. I was captured, and the other two either were captured or soon would be. This was the first indication I had of the fate of my comrades. I said a quiet prayer for them. The major said "I was not to worry, as for me the war is over." He then told me he had served in North Africa and Italy, but was now home in his native Frankfurt.

Sometime later an ambulance arrived at the station and I was carried by stretcher into it. The stretcher bearers were French P.O.W's. I was taken to the Frankfurt Civil Hospital. This hospital was manned by elderly German doctors and the nursing staff were nuns. I was taken to a ward and then to a theatre. My right ankle was numbed by a local injection and put under traction to get it in place. I was then put in Plaster of Paris up to the right knee. I was taken back to the ward where my escort and stretcher were awaiting me. I was then transported to a prisoner of war camp - Stalag 12A in Frankfurt, not far from the railway station. I was received into the camp and into the hospital hut.

The camp was full of American P.O.W's captured in the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes. There were British P.O.W's, mainly members of the 1st Airborne Division captured at Arnhem. Many of these were also wounded and also hospitalised. After about a week in the hospital hut we were informed that prisoners were being transported east, mainly Silesia, where most of the prison camps were situated. I was kept with a group of members of the Glider Pilot Regiment and other airborne N.C.O's and we were told we would be sent to Stalag Luft III. Other army P.O.W's would be sent to appropriate Stalags.

The next day we were transported the short distance to the railway sidings. It was an extremely cold morning, with a heavy frost. I stood on my crutches and looked over the sidings; they still bore evidence of a heavy air attack. (No doubt the one I had been on earlier.) One could see the traces of bomb craters, now filled in, but with traces of the sub clay evident. The craters were filled with ballast and new tracks laid with the usual German efficiency. In the centre of the sidings was a train made up of box cars (cattle trucks).

Not far from me sitting on a tree stump was an American army officer P.O.W. For some reason he had two great coats. He wore one, and he had the other one over his knees. He looked at me shivering in my battle dress and handed me the coat saying, "Have this Boy.", a true American gentleman. Thus, I acquired a khaki American great coat, which served me well for the next three months. My Airborne companions, and I, were escorted across the sidings, and into one of the box cars. The sliding doors were shut and a pin put in the catch. As evening approached each box car was opened in turn, and we were given a ration of hot cabbage and potato soup. The doors were then re-fastened.

The box cars had been furnished with a wooden platform at each end, covered with straw. There was a small window at each corner, better described as an air vent. Through these we could look at what was happening outside. Armed German guards patrolled each side of the train. Soon other trains shunted into the adjacent tracks. These were mainly flat trucks, containing tanks and other armoured vehicles. This made us feel uncomfortable. Darkness fell, and the night wore on, until one of us keeping watch from the ventilator/window said he could see fireworks exploding at the sidings. I immediately knew what was going to happen, and advised my colleagues that the fireworks were markers being put down by Pathfinders to mark a target, and we could expect the main force of the bombs soon.

The German guards patrolling the train disappeared, leaving us locked in the train. The smallest man in the room volunteered to be pushed through the window vent. He was lowered to the ground outside, and removed the pin holding the sliding doors shut. A husky Airborne para type told me to get on his back, and together we crossed the rail tracks to a field nearby as bombs rained down on the sidings. When in the field I was blown off the back of my carrier, and found it was necessary for me to run on my broken ankle, to get further away from the bombing. My simple fracture became a compound fracture. The air raid was almost over as soon as it had started. Some of the Airborne boys decided to escape and become evaders, but the guards soon appeared and rounded us up. We were escorted back to our boxes. Some sections of the train had been hit, and I was later told that some 60 U.S. servicemen were killed. Our train was re-made up, and in the early morning of the next day, we commenced our journey to Eastern Germany.

The journey took us about a week with stops at various small sidings on the way where we were fed and watered. The food being, mainly cabbage soup, potatoes and black bread. Eventually we arrived at a siding which was Sagan. Escorts and stretcher bearers awaited us and we were taken to a P.O.W hospital. We were told we were in Stalag Luft III. I was examined by the German doctor who was the hospital commandant. The damaged and broken plaster on my right ankle was removed and the wound attended to. I was allocated a bunk bed in the hospital hutment.

The staff at the hospital were mainly French. At the time of the French surrender in 1940, the Germans had captured many French field hospitals. Under the terms of the Geneva Convention these non-combatants should have been returned to France. The Vichy French Government had however made an agreement with the victors to replace these doctors and medical orderlies, on a two year rota basis. I have to

record that the French doctors and medical staff gave us P.O.W's excellent service. There was also a number of British, Canadian and South African doctors, also prisoners of war with us, who also treated all P.O.W's. Thus we spent Christmas 1944 and saw the end of the year and the new year of 1945 began.

The new year saw the war both in the East and the West step up. The Western Allies prepared to cross the river Rhine and the Red Army in the East pursued the Germans through East Prussia, Poland and the Ukraine. After the Battle of Warsaw, a number of Polish P.O.W were received at the camp. The Russian advance continued and we witnessed flights of twin engined Russian bombers over flying the camp to attack enemy positions to the west of us. As January turned to February we could hear the rumble of distant gunfire to the east. Soon the Germans started the great march westwards. Any P.O.W who could walk was forced on the great march. I was still in Plaster of Paris, and destined to stay put. The P.O.W's from neighbouring army camps that were not mobile enough to go on the march were brought to Stalag Luft III Hospital.

Very soon the war moved closer to Sagan. The German guards abandoned the camp and retreated westwards. The Red Army captured the town of Sagan, and appeared to the east of the camp and the hospital complex. Artillery was brought up and shells were exchanged over the camp to the enemy in the west. Some shells actually fell within the camp boundary, but with no injury to us. I watched the Russians set up guns just outside the camp boundary wire. I was amazed to see the guns were horse driven; it reminded me of the photographs of World War One.

At about this time we saw a flight of about thirty Russian bombers fly over the camp. A lone Focke Wulf 190 German fighter appeared and shot most of them down. (This demonstrated to me the value of the Allied bomber offensive, strategic bombing had so effected German industrial production that only one fighter aircraft was available to attack the Russian Air Force.) The fighter withdrew, possibly only when he had exhausted his ammunition. It was probably true to comment that German equipment was superior to that of the Russian forces. However, there was just not enough of it. On the 22nd February, 1945, the Russian forces broke down the boundary wires of our camp and swarmed into Stalag Luft III. We of course were delighted to welcome them. The Russians were just as pleased to greet us. There was much hand shaking and back slapping.

It was soon arranged that everyone who wished to leave Stalag Luft III could do so. They would be helped to the cart and transport arranged from the town of Sagan. I walked out on my crutches to get a taste of freedom, but returned to camp as I realised I could not make it into the town. Transport was to be arranged from the camp for those who could not walk far. Captured German vans came to the camp the next day. We were loaded about four to each van and driven out of the camp. We moved eastwards, through territory which bore signs of recent heavy warfare. Eventually, with stops for food etc. we arrived outside the city of Krakow. We were taken to a large barn which was a military field hospital. We entered by the large west doorway, once inside with other casualties a separation took place. Those with upper body injuries were directed to the north side of the barn. We, who had leg injuries were directed to the south. There

were benches along the north and south walls, along which we shuffled towards the east. Medical staff examined each patient as they moved along the bench.

Any that required treatment were taken to the centre of the barn where there was a line of trestle type operating tables. They were then operated on as required. Fortunately, all our group were already in plaster casts. We made our way without the need to visit the tables. However, when we were half way across a Russian soldier with a badly shattered arm was taken from the other side and brought to the tables at the centre. His right arm was amputated from just above the elbow and we were witnesses to the operation. The light was poor and the surgeon called for more light. A candelabra was produced and the light held close until the work was complete. We eventually reached the east door, and found our vans and drivers waiting. They drove us to the city of Krakow where we were admitted to the hospital.

We stayed in Krakow for about ten days, when we moved again; this time by train to Lvov in south east Poland. (A part of Poland which the Soviet Union had annexed.) Again we were accommodated in the local hospital, but this time in a ward with the wounded Russian officers. The commandant of the hospital was an extremely attractive lady doctor from Siberia.

During the stay in Lvov my ankle felt stronger and I could now put my weight on it. The plaster cast was removed, but I still used crutches. After breakfast each morning I made a habit of taking a short walk along the road out of the town, about half a mile along the road was an abandoned German motor lorry, which was pushed off to the side of the road. I used to stop and rest awhile on the front wing of the vehicle, and enjoy the weak spring sunshine. One morning breakfast was late, hence my walk was delayed. I took my crutches and began to walk towards the abandoned lorry. I could see the vehicle some hundred yards before me, with three or four young Polish children playing on it. Suddenly there was a terrific bang and the lorry blew up. The children were killed. It was apparent that the Germans on retreating had booby trapped the lorry. The children had entered the cab and triggered the explosion. I returned to the hospital ward where a Russian officer produced a bottle of vodka and a glass from under his bed and gave me a stiff drink. He must have seen how shocked I was. If breakfast had not of been late that morning I could have been resting on the wing of the lorry at the fatal moment.

It was now early April, we continued our stay in Lvov, going into town and meeting some of the local Polish community. The Poles were always delighted to meet a Britisher. They regarded us highly, always remembering that we had declared war because Germany had invaded Poland in 1939. One day the Polish flags draped in black appeared at the upper windows of many houses. We asked why and were informed that President Roosevelt had died suddenly. The date was 12th April, 1945. After another weeks sojourn in Lvov a former French P.O.W (not in our party) visited the hospital and informed us that an Allied military mission was in the town looking for prisoners of war. They were based in a hotel, in the town square. We decided that two of our number should go into town and try to contact the Allied group. They found a British colonel in charge of the group of Allied officers, looking for any P.o.W's, we reported our group at the hospital. The colonel asked them to return and promised they

would be 'found' the next day. The group consisted of British, Australian, French and a Canadian R.C.A.F flight lieutenant who spoke fluent Russian and acted as an interpreter. He then informed the colonel that the Russians had taken our uniforms and that we required clothing as we only had the striped Russian hospital uniform. We were told not to worry as they had a quartermaster sergeant who held stocks of British battledress uniform.

The next day as agreed in the morning the Allied group visited the hospital and 'found' us. The quartermaster took our measurements and sizes, and that afternoon appeared with kitbags containing the appropriate clothing including underwear and boots. The colonel confirmed me as the senior N.C.O to be in charge of the group, and said he was arranging transport to Odessa in the Black Sea. Two days later transport was arranged to take our party to the railway station. I was given a pass, listing us by name, rank and number and asking that we be given every assistance to Odessa. The document was typed in English on one side and Russian on the reverse, and enclosed in a transparent cellophane envelope.

We travelled to Kiev, in the Ukraine, not in a box car this time but in proper passenger carriages. At Kiev, which we noted was a devastated city; we changed trains and proceeded to Odessa. On arrival at Odessa we were met and then transported to a large hospital on the seafront. The hospital contained in its basement a spa of hot black mud, which bubbled from the ground. Each morning we were taken there to have our limbs encased in the mud. It was alleged to be extremely beneficial.

It was now early May, 1945. On a certain evening after we had retired to bed we were roused by Russian staff firing automatic weapons from the hospital windows. On enquiring the reason we were informed that Germany had surrendered. This was therefore V.E Day. The European War was over! Soon after the Canadian Air Force officer came to see us. He informed us that a British ship had docked in Odessa bringing Ukrainians found in P.O.W camps in Italy back to the U.S.S.R. The ship was now being prepared to take us to Italy. Two days later we were transported to the ship and allocated quarters aboard. That evening we sailed back into the Black Sea bound for Bosphorous.

The ship anchored off Istanbul in Turkey. The British Ambassador Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen and his lady came aboard to welcome us on our way home. He asked us if there was anything he could get us. We replied that whilst in Poland and Russia we drank Pevu (weak polish beer) and vodka and we would very much like a proper pint of beer. He promised to see what he could do, and returned ashore in his launch. He was as good as his word. His launch returned with two small barrels of the Nectar of Burton. The ships carpenter rigged us up a couple of trestles to hold the beer barrels. The next day we sat on the deck with regulation mugs drinking the beer. It was a beautiful spring day; the Gallipoli peninsular looked wonderful covered in almond and cherry blossoms. Eventually we sailed through the Aegean Sea and arrived at the Italian port of Taranto.

We were taken off the ship and transported to the large military hospital in the city where we were all given a medical examination. I remember the doctors thought I looked rather pale and prescribed an iron tonic. During our stay in the hospital Lady

Mountbatten visited us on a tour of Southern Italy, which she was visiting as Commandant of the British Red Cross. I was presented to her, she was very gracious and asked me about prison camp, and if we had received the Red Cross parcels. I replied in the affirmative and thanked her and the Red Cross as no doubt the parcels were a lifesaver.

After two weeks in Taranto, I was visited by a wing commander who was commanding officer in Naples. He informed me that arrangements were being made to ship all P.O.W's in a troopship to the United Kingdom, via Gibraltar. He said that if I was transferred to Naples he would use his best endeavours to get me a seat on a Transport Command aircraft flying from Naples to the UK. I readily agreed to be transferred to Naples. The next day an RAF ambulance picked me up, and after saying my goodbyes to my army friends who had accompanied me from Stalag Luft III through Poland and Russia, I left for Naples. I was kept for a few days in an RAF hospital in Naples, and then told that a seat had been found for me on a York aircraft flying to Blackbushe in England. We flew over Italy and France. I recall flying over Paris where the Eiffel Tower was clearly visible.

We landed at Blackbushe Airport. I was transported in a small bus to a large military hospital in Aldershot. What a delight it was to be travelling again in England's leafy lanes, to be back in England's green and pleasant land.

Lancaster PD 322 EM-C Crew

The aircrew was commanded by the pilot Flight Officer Bryan John Henderson of the Royal Australian Air Force. He was known as 'Hep' because of his fondness for the popular swing music of the time. He was an excellent and well respected pilot, always in complete command and control of his aircraft and crew. 'Hep' originated from Perth, Western Australia. R.I.P

Flight Officer William McQuade was the navigator, originally from the city of Glasgow. Will was a great navigator and a formidable mathematician. R.I.P

Flight Sergeant Donald Reid was a wireless operator. The second member of the team to originate from Perth, Western Australia. Donald was a competent and well thought of member of the crew. R.I.P

Sergeant John Taylor, flight engineer. John was the last member to join our crew. He came from Yorkshire and was a straight talking lad and well trained man - excellent at his work. P.O.W

Sergeant Peter W Hornfeck, rear air gunner. A highly skilled and talented air gunner from the Midlands area of England. He was to be a valued member of the crew. P.O.W

Sergeant Eric T Gibson, mid upper air gunner. Eric was a highly trained air gunner, his nickname was 'Junior', nothing to do with his position but because of his very youthful

appearance. With his very fair complexion and blond hair he looked no more than sixteen years of age, although he claimed to be eighteen. R.I.P

Flight Sergeant Bob Massey-Shaw - Trained in Canada at Bombing and Gunnery School near London, Ontario and then at No.1 Air Observer School, Malton near Toronto. Completed training in November, 1943. I was awarded Observer Brevet at 'Wings' parade, then returned to England early 1944. Completed training and under P.N.B scheme made air bomber. Average bombing error in training - 100 yards from 10,000ft to 12,000ft. This improved squadron service (I can modestly say) as evidenced by the automatic photographs of bombing operations to direct hits on target.

REST IN PEACE

Those who died are buried in Rheinberg War Cemetery, Germany. May the Lord's perpetual light shine on them.

How did I adapt to Civvy Street?

I think I adapted quite well. I am very proud to have served in H.M.O.S.S in Nyasaland (Now Malawi.) Then after, I settled down in Swansea as a site engineer for the Welsh Hospital Board and finally retired in 1988. I was elected County Councillor for West Glamorgan C.C in 1972 and held my seat until 1996 when with local government organisation the county was abolished.

What do you think your fellow comrades would make of the country as it is now?

I think that my comrades would be very disappointed with the state this country is, as of now. The hopeless and deceiving Government which has been unable to look after our country and has brought it to a sorry mess.

Are you happy or disappointed with the country in 2008?

As you can see from my answer to the previous question I am disappointed. Only a general election in the near future, which will oust this so called New Labour Government and put our feet on the right road to a balanced and fair country.

Dear Mr Pringle

With reference to your letter in the Carmarthen Journal. I am replying to the best of my ability, because I am afraid that you probably will not have many replies. If you are snowed under I am astonished and mistaken.

Born in 1917, I have many memories of the years soon after the end of the 1914-1919 war. There was widespread poverty; tramps (mostly ex-soldiers) in tattered khaki walked from workhouse to workhouse daily for a bed and breakfast, and begged for a penny or two on the way. Sometimes working at a farm temporarily and sleeping in a haystack. My experience is in Carmarthenshire and I understand from what I have read that more Welsh men joined the forces in the First World War as a percentage of total

populations than English, Scottish or Welsh.

I saw the Hindenberg airship fly over Llandeilo on its way from Germany to America, as a young lad, (green at 16). I joined the RAF in 1933 to fly, and if possible to become a pilot. In 1940 whilst waiting to go on a pilots course my unit was sent to West Africa, so became the end of my dream. However, as a wireless engineer I had done some good flying. F/Lt Briggs found the Bismarck and I done a fair bit of flying with him, delivering Sunderlands from the UK to Singapore, but I was not with him when he found the Bismarck. He always said that the Bismarck found him, he was fired on and so he knew that there was something below.

From 1933 to 1939 there was considerable opposition to the forces. In uniform you could be spat on, and some of my colleagues said that they experienced this on the Swansea to London train, when returning to Cranwell from leave. Colliers mostly, fought in Spain against Franco. The Spanish Government was communist legitimately and the RAF flew Franco from North America to Madrid to lead the Spanish Army in revolt against the legitimate government. A little bit of history kept under wraps!

Now is the kind of news you require, because keeping quiet about my experience requires an outlet. My eldest brother was in the same action as Tasker Watkins, when Tasker won the V.C. (Sir Tasker Watkins 1918-2007, was a coal miners son from Nelson, Caerphilly. He won a scholarship to the local grammar school and later became a teacher in London. On the outbreak of war he joined the Welch Regiment. The following is the official citation for his Victoria Cross 'On 16 August 1944 at Barfour, Normandy, France, Lieutenant Watkins' company came under murderous machine-gun fire while advancing through corn fields set with booby traps. The only officer left, Lieutenant Watkins led a bayonet charge with his 30 remaining men against 50 enemy infantry, practically wiping them out. Finally, at dusk, separated from the rest of the battalion, he ordered his men to scatter and after he had personally charged and silenced an enemy machine-gun post, he brought them back to safety. His superb leadership not only saved his men, but decisively influenced the course of the battle.' In the following post war decades he had a high profile legal career and went on to become deputy Lord Chief Justice, a member of the Privy Council, and President of the Welsh Rugby Union. In his youth he had played as an outside half for Cardiff RFC, Glamorgan Wanderers and the Army rugby team.) My next brother flew as a pilot from Iceland to Scotland to look for the Duke of Kent who was going to Iceland to meet an important German for peace talks. I was almost drowned, twice, in flying boats looking for submarines. One sister was in the Wrens, and the last in the Air Raid Organisation. Father, who was in the Army during the First World War, was wounded in the Home Guard and mother had two evacuees - two young lovers from Brum!

Mr G Bowen

(A reply from a few follow up questions I sent with my thanks letter.)

Dear Mr Pringle

Thanks for your letter. Swansea, I may say, saw a lot of the war - Some 350 acres

of the centre was flattened by the Wehrmacht as the (part of) invasion fleet for D-Day was harboured here. One of the USA's unbeaten heavyweight boxers was here, (forgot his name). In 1937 the RAF tried to develop Hornsea Mere (Yorkshires largest freshwater lake) off Bridlington as a base. I was there at the time! Now to your tome

G Bowen

What is your most vivid memory of the war, can you explain?

No, to many. Spent most of my time with flying boat squadrons and I understand that the RAF sank more submarines; German and Italian, than the Navy. I don't say in derision but the task was easier. The aeroplane ie. the RAF had the advantage - guarding convoys, whereas subs were searching for the convoy.

What are your memories of serving in West Africa?

Grim. Normally RAF squadrons were under the control of Coastal Command. In West Africa we were under Naval Command. My signals were sent to the naval officer in charge, Operations Room, Freetown. For some considerable time, 95 squadron (part of 210 squadron), were the only RAF unit in an area from Gibraltar to Cape Town and we felt isolated and the only ones fighting the war. Troopships carrying troops for the second front in Italy had to come to Freetown for drinking water. This is where memory fails... One troopship with 3 regiments and the odd RAF relief man was sunk. 800 men to a regiment. 2,400 in total, crew and odd 25 or so RAF relief. Most were drowned. We lost 4 boats out of 8. One RAF relief related to me seeing an army chaplain putting on his vestments and going below, reading presumably the funeral service. My relief man wanted to take up the task of putting forward this chaplain for a mention. Unfortunately, he didn't know which regiment, nor even which denomination.

What are your memories of flying Sunderlands?

A beautiful machine. Comfortable, safe, double decker, kitchen, toilet, bunks and steady. (The Short Sunderland was a large sea plane that could land on open water developed by Short Brothers. It took its first flight in 1937 and during the war was involved with countering the threat from U-boats during the Battle of Atlantic. The Germans nicknamed it the "Fliegendes Stachelschwein" (Flying Porcupine) due to its many defensive guns and several antennas protruding from it.)

You say you nearly drowned twice, can you give more details?

Night flying exercises pre war. A heavy landing and the boat broke into two. Me in one part, and the rest in the other. Pembroke Dock - reported in the press two dead, one seriously injured, myself slightly but had some difficulty getting out as my part of the boat was upside down. Very dark night, but shipping lights were a great help in enabling me to know where I was, as the ruins were sinking.....A grandson - Australian lad of about 19 or so called on me recently, year or two ago. Wanted details of his grandpa.

Can you explain how you flew from UK > Singapore and experiences along the way?
Stop offs etc.

Pembroke Dock to Gibraltar - press reported as a record. Gibraltar to Alexandria. Naval gymkhana or so in progress and saw arabs in control of what appeared to be Nubian slaves as oarsmen, very striking. After to Habbaniya (RAF Habbaniya was situated in Iraq, on the banks of the River Euphrates, 60 miles from Baghdad.) - RAF had assisted Amy Johnson on one of her record trips to Australia and had demanded as payment one of her drawers - then on display. Habbaniya to Karachi to Gwalior - flew around the Taj Mahal - present views of Princess Diana seated there brings back memories. Gwalior to Calcutta and picked up Captain Martel, later General Martel and the Army's leading man in that field - tanks. Calcutta to Rangoon and landed on the Irawaddy due to severe electric storm, then Singapore.

What was your saddest time and happiest time during the war?

Saddest time. Occasionally in West Africa we had a day off. A lorry load would be taken to a local beach and there was a lagoon there. Hamilton, perhaps 18 but more likely 17, and I, went for a walk ignorant of the fact that the lagoon was tidal and as the tide was full, swimming across the entrance was child's play. On coming back the lagoon entrance was a mill race and we had no option but to swim across, not too difficult. What was impossible however was standing up to go ashore. The mill race was taking the sand and whoever tried to stand up in it, out to sea. Hamilton however, found the only rock outcrop and could hang on to it. He called out to me "Over here Sir!" and came back to help me share his safety net until the tide had gone out sufficiently to be safe. This was Tuesday and Hamilton went out on patrol the following Thursday and never returned.

Do you have memories of any comrades who did not survive the war, who were they and how were they killed and your memories of them?

See previous for Hamilton. Hewerdine went down with the Duke of Kent, so did Ron Jones 047 - You have to put the last three numbers after Ron Jones, as we had two Ron Jones in the squadron. The Duke of Kent (Uncle of Queen Elizabeth II) was supposed to meet Martin Bormann in Iceland. He was an Air Commodore and wearing his uniform flying from Oban to Iceland. My view - Kent got cold feet and ordered the flying boat from 228 Squadron to return to Oban and ran into a mountain. Rescue craft searched the North Sea fruitlessly. My brother flew from Iceland to Scotland looking for him.

Do you recall any funny moments, songs, social events during the war?

Not many outstanding in more ways than one. 1938 during the Spanish war, 210 Squadron, I was in Arzeu near Oran (Algeria) ostensibly defending merchant ships supplying food to Spain. The squadron played a game of football against the French Foreign Legion at their headquarters, Sidi Bel Abbes, 90 miles inland from Arzeu and I didn't go as I didn't fancy riding in a charabanc for 90 miles. Hence nursing the line as everyone would strike up, "When I was with the French Foreign Legion at Sidi Bel Abbes!"

Is there anything else you would like to add?

So many memories flooding in. Flew with Briggs who later was called 'Bismarck Briggs' he is credited with finding the Bismarck but he said it was the Bismarck that found him as the first thing he and his crew knew about it was the anti aircraft exploding around the aircraft. Flew over the Graf Spey during the Spanish war. Lost a number of friends when one of our Sunderlands attempted to bomb the Tirpitz. Sunderland shot down by German Air Force, one survivor - Ogwin George.

What are your thoughts on the country today, are you happy or disappointed with how things are?

Going to the dogs fast. All political parties have had their annual meetings recently and not one has mentioned in his address our army in Iraq or Afghanistan. The Chairman of the Libs was asked "What is the amount of the old age pension?" Reply - "£30 per week."

Dear Sir,

In answer to your letter in the local paper, headed 'War Veterans Views Sought'. I am a veteran of the 39-45 conflict who has now reached the ripe old age of 93, and I pen this letter with some difficulty owing to failing eyesight, but I will try to give you my opinion of this country as it is today.

This once green and pleasant land has been drowned in a Tsunami of immigrants of all colours and creeds, where a true British subject must take second place. Our assets have been sold to foreign countries. If I want to travel from Wales into England, I have to pay a French company for the privilege, and in any domestic dispute with these immigrants they get the benefit of the doubt. I know because I live next door to a typical family of ***** neighbours from hell, and up to the present I have had to take second place.

I fought for this country in the last war, I was not conscripted. I volunteered to serve in the Royal Engineers, I also volunteered for parachuting and served my entire service (6 years) in the 3rd Para Assault Squadron, R.E 6th Airborne Division and fought in three major battles, i.e the Normandy Landings, the Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge) and the Rhine Crossing.

But when I was demobbed I found that I could not claim my old job back because I was not directed by the Ministry of Labour, but that is typical of the War Dept and the Civil Service. One only has to read in the papers of the disgusting way that the gallant Ghurkas are being treated, and also the serving soldiers and airmen who are being killed and maimed as I write.

Even the poor Badgers are being culled for spreading Tuberculosis, when thousands of immigrants both legal and illegal are entering this country without any medical screening, whatsoever, and they receive handsome financial aid while British

pensioners get a 2p rise.

There was a time when the Union flag was held in respect by all and revered by many. We in Wales even though we are not recognised on the British flag, I still respect it, but I don't respect the War Dept. Sometimes I think the BNP have the right idea.

When I heard through the media that the Land Girls, Lumber Girls etc were to be recognised for services during the war it set me thinking, there were some females in the Home Guard, and one particular woman that I know served in the ATS with the Royal Artillery on Ack Ack, so first I applied for the veterans badge for her, which she received. That set me thinking about war medals such as the War Medal and the Defence Medal, so with her permission I made an application for them. After one or two letters and a search of her services recorded she received both medals, over 60 years late! Why weren't those women notified on demob like the men? I wonder how many women don't know of their entitlement.

H Barnsley

(Mr Barnsley's letter was the last to appear in the original edition of this book.)

Dear N Pringle

My funds don't normally run to allow the luxury of a newspaper, but I bought the Western Morning News really to see if they had printed my letter on all this Jack Straw / Muslim integration nonsense. Our leaders have, in the past, made a thing of the need to 'integrate' but I venture to suggest that they only have to look at the way French society has developed to realise that, at least as far as Muslims are concerned, such integration ideals are unrealistic. My outlandish surname belies the fact that my dad was born and brought up in Plymouth. He never spoke of his paternal ancestry. In fact his dad, lost at sea before WWI was of Prussian / Silesia origin. Because of pre WWI anti German feeling, my dad, to show his Britishness, was one of the first to join the Territorial Army and the TA subsequently became his hobby and despite a working class background he ended up as a colonel. Mobilised the local infantry battalion (5 Devon) at the start of WWII and having been made a Deputy Lieutenant for Devon mixed with all the 'landed gentry' in these parts. An inveterate name dropper!!!

I never had any time for 'my country right or wrong', was and still am a pacifist. What I say is this! We are what we are, what shows on our passport is through accident of birth. Anyone who enters politics should do so with the aim of improving the lives of all sentient beings, human or animal, on Planet Earth.

My war service was late August '39 to February '41 - Royal Navy, mainly on a destroyer on East Coast convoy duties. Chucked out after having made my pacifist feelings known! March '41 to April '46 - Royal Engineers, North Africa and Italy. I was part of Operation Torch (invasion of North Africa).

In October 1942 I was a simple sapper in a Docks Operating Co Royal Engineers (Transportation) and had, on 13 October 1942, embarked on a troopship the former Orient Liner SS Otranto. We were still left completely in the dark about our eventual

destination. I noted, with some misgivings, that slung from our davits, instead of lifeboats, were assault landing craft. Also that many of the other troops on board were Commandos or U.S. Rangers. So it looked like we were bound for some offensive expedition. Much time was spent on lifeboat drills, waiting for meals, queuing up for the canteen etc. Mostly we just lazed around sunbathing.

We were encouraged to do a bit of practise on getting up and down scrambling nets and rope ladders in full equipment and the Commandos had been kept busy all through the trip doing this sort of thing — taking up their positions in the assault craft, finding their way to their disembarkation points, blindfolded etc. Once we had got through the Straits of Gibraltar, the whole scheme of our particular operation against Algiers was made public and any one of us was free to pore over any maps, plans etc that we wanted to. Large relief models of the various beaches we were to take were on view and the lectures were given on precise plans. We were told we would be ferried over to a cargo ship, the City of Worcester, which it was our task to unload. Precisely at 2200 hours 7 November we dropped anchor, 10 miles off shore and over the Tannoy came the order 'No 1 Commando — man your boats'. We were expecting to have to do the same thing at 0600 hours to go over to the City of Worcester. When we did go, the sea seemed quite rough, felt even rougher being in a flat-bottomed landing craft. We all got thoroughly soaked and it was a nerve-wracking experience getting up the rope ladder. The first cargo to be put ashore comprised tins of water and of petrol and boxes of rations. Worked all day and all night and next day, 9 November, after breakfast, were told to take a rest as we would be discharging the rest in Algiers Docks, the port having been taken. We berthed at about 1700 hours right at the head of the Quai de Calais.

At the end of November 1943 I set out for Italy. Bari, our destination, was one of the principal entry points for materials for the Italian campaign and its port was jammed full of shipping. We arrived there in the middle of an air raid which, from the tactical point of view, was one of the most successful ever carried out by one of the combatants. Among the many ships which the Luftwaffe sent to the bottom was one with a cargo of mustard gas and many deaths resulted before the medical authorities realised what the problem was.

My time in active service was all a bit of a doddle! Algerian brothels and nights at the opera in Italy! VJ Day saw me in Rome in an office job. I had a good pal, Bill an Exeter chap, and I was horrified to hear him say after VE Day, "now we'll have to have a go at those Russian bastards." But these had been our allies!!

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS - eg, women in the armed services in combat roles. In this sort of situation how can we ever hope that the pacifist message will get through to the up and coming generation. The Pill - There's little doubt that this has led to a deterioration in moral standards. In most newsagents nowadays besides the 'glossies' intended for young males there are now similar explicit magazines for women. Also, it's unusual to find one of the old style women's magazines which does not have some reference to sex on its cover. My old boss at the GWR in Plymouth, a Methodist preacher, used to say, "An over-rated past time Mister!" Most people of my generation would agree!

As an 'internationalist' I believe in planet wide freedom of movement, without

need for passports. Maybe if I lived in South East London I would not be inclined to maintain such a stance. Can't really call myself a Christian, let's say a 'non believer'. I consider myself to be a very lucky chap, 86 and still reasonably mobile and mentally alert. My Joan is 82, married 52 years and quite honestly I could never have reached this stage of my life had I not had her support, a truly wonderful wife and mother!

Sincerely
Godfrey Wycisk - pronounced Wyzik!

p.s Despite my 'pacifist beliefs' I have cherished memories of my time in the Navy. Cheery and supportive shipmates all of them!

Dear Mr Pringle

I'm writing to tell you what I think of England now; terrible. Well, it is where we live, scared to open the door if anyone knocks, hardly anyone speaks to us. Was without milk and bread for three days as my husband was ill and couldn't leave him. Any help we want we have got to pay for, it's all pay out.

Went into the Air Force at 17 1/2, served 6 years as a WAAF, was L.A.C.W. My husband also an airman, was in Singapore 2 years, also India. He is ill now with kidney failure, also eye trouble. I've also had cancer, lost my youngest daughter with cancer. My eldest daughter lives in Canada, so we have no one, as most of them are dead. My husband and I are 84. I asked the Air Force to help in some way, but nobody cares and nobody came. It is not a fit country to live in now. Nobody has a joke or laughs anymore and those lovely lads who never came back after they went on ops. In fact I cry for them every Xmas and when the poppies come out. We will never forget them, what they died for I don't know.

My father an old soldier shot himself at 83, he didn't want to live anymore. I feel sorry for the young people today. They haven't much to look forward to, scared to go out at night, can't get jobs, dirty streets, no nice shops or dance halls. We had to go to war but it was safe to walk the streets and safe on the trains. We had lots of fun at the dances and made lovely friends, saw places we would never have seen if we hadn't joined up. A lot of it was rough, no hot water, only heat in the Nissan huts at night, 14 WAAFs in one hut from all walks of life. Used to be some good old fights now and again when one of them had walked off with the other ones boyfriend. We used to dance with the air crews and drink and sing with them. Off they used to go on the ops and never see them again. It was awful, some you really liked.

I could go on forever, not much to look forward to now, only doctors and hospitals and if you've got any money they want it. If you go in an old peoples home they want the lot. That's if you've got any. If I was in charge of the country I would bring the hanging back, because a lot of them are not fit to live.

Bye for now, had my say for now

Mrs Martin

Dear Sir,

My story would start in 1941 when I left school at the age of 14 to start work for the LMS Railway. By now we were beginning to get the sirens going every night. We soon got used to dashing into the air raid shelter and huddled in there listening for the unmistakable pulsating drone of the German bombers overhead. We knew what they were looking for, because Wolverhampton had some very important factories. When the bombers were overhead all the anti aircraft guns opened up in a mighty crescendo. The morning after we would go out of the house and would find the street littered with shrapnel, quite large pieces of jagged metal, even nose cones off 'pom pom shells'. I remember one night seeing that the search lights sweeping the sky had picked out a parachute coming down and followed it as low as they could. I always wondered after, who it was, and if he survived the war.

I worked as a locomotive fireman; hard work, long hours and I didn't see my two brothers who also worked on the railways very much due to odd shifts that we had to work. The longest shift I did lasted 14 hours. Coming back from Crewe to Wolverhampton we had to stop out in the country due to a red signal. Then we heard that pulsating drone above us, enemy aircraft! After half an hour the driver decided to walk to the signal box round the next bend. After a while he came back and said Coventry is being blitzed, we have to stay here. But the fire in the boiler was burning low and needed stoking up. I thought how could I do that without giving the game away to the planes above? The driver solved this by quickly opening and closing the firebox each time I had a shovelful of coal ready. When we got back to the sheds in the early dawn there was a strong smell of paraffin, due to the smoke screen that was activated around the aircraft factories. Dad, who had been working at Boulton Pauls, making Defiants, was sent to a shadow factory in Wales, by Mount Snowdon, so he could only come home once a month for a weekend.

It wasn't all work and no play though. Wolverhampton was a very vibrant and happy town, we had plenty of things to do and places to go. Cinemas, dance halls, skating ring, theatres, pubs, bands in the park. The town would come alive at the weekends because in the surrounding countryside were camped American soldiers; black and white, Dutch soldiers, air force men from the local air base, Land Army girls and Red Caps scooting around in Jeeps keeping order. It really was a joy to see. This wasn't to last however. When I started seeing convoys of Army lorries all travelling south I knew something was happening, also there was train loads of tanks going south. That's when the town started going quiet again..

My call up papers arrived and I had thoughts of joining the RAF, so I took them to work. The boss said "Sorry! We can't let you go, you are already doing work of national importance, leave them with me." And that was it. I was still quite happy at my work as a fireman and we were getting some monster looking engines from America to replace what had been bombed. I was lucky to be made a fireman at such a

young age, due to the shortage of men who had gone to war and I became qualified to go on passenger trains, which was better because you got to travel to more interesting places than goods yards.

At this point I would like to say a few words about our mom! Bless her and praise her for the work she did. With Dad working away, she was head of the family and her job was to feed us. Despite the rationing we never went hungry. We had chickens, but Mom would go shopping every day and queued for hours to get the little extras that people heard about on the grapevine. I think Winston Churchill got it right when he said, "They also serve, who only stand and wait." I was lucky, I could take egg and bacon to work and fry it on the shovel in the firebox of the engine. I still remember the spam sandwiches, it wasn't so bad, I actually liked it, and we got extra cheese on the ration book for being firemen. I really think they should have struck a medal for the wartime mothers. They just didn't get the recognition they deserved.

It really took a good number of years for anything to get back to something like normal. There didn't seem to be any real plans for the peace. People were beginning to say "did we really win the war?" All the effort seemed to be towards rebuilding Europe! It might have been a good idea to have set up lots of training schools for the lads, so they could offer employers something more than "I can shoot a gun or drive a tank." It was not unusual during this period to see the ex soldiers or sailors with a chestful of medals begging in the town, selling razor blades and pens. Some would have a leg or arm missing. You could see from the ribbons where they had been; Burma, Egypt, the Atlantic and Europe. They deserved a better homecoming than this. It seems from recent news reports that our wounded from Afghanistan and Iraq are also being abandoned when they come home. Someone has to get a grip on this!

(At the end of the war Mr Robinson got his wish to join the RAF, and did training in Rhodesia. He was then selected for the Aeronautical Inspection Service and then put forward for SAS training at Hereford and passed the course in the Welsh mountains, serving until 1956.)

Fallen comrades must be turning in their graves now at the thought of Britain being given away to Europe, after they have given their lives for our freedom. Veterans I speak with are all of the same opinion, it must not happen! On the whole I'm quite satisfied with the way the country is going. There is a lot of regeneration going on everywhere. Immigration is a sore point. The authorities tell them to integrate and yet they have allowed them to take over large areas of the city to the extent that now, in my area, it is officially 98% Indian. Almost every house and shop is now Indian and there are mosques springing up everywhere. Really, if I had wanted to live in this sort of environment I would have emigrated to Bombay.

Best Wishes
G Robinson

(I decided to send a letter to Australian and New Zealand newspapers, to see if there was any British WWII veterans 'Down Under', after moving there after the war. How were they doing compared with their fellow veterans here in the UK? I also said it would be great to hear from

Kiwi and Aussie born veterans, What were their wartime memories and how did they find New Zealand and Australia in the 21st century?

Finally, after plotting the locations of all British letter writers from the original edition on a map, I was able to notice places I had not heard from. I sent the original letter to newspapers I had missed out or was unaware of when I sent it the first time. After I had done this I was confident I had sent the letter to literally every regional newspaper in Britain.)

AUSTRALIA

Dear Nick

That letter first drew my wife Andrina's attention. It was in the Courier that covers West Haven where we live on the mid north coast of New South Wales. I have been in Australia fifty one years, and served in the whole of the war in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, first in the Cavalry, then later with Tanks. I'm 92 years of age. Before the war I was employed by Fenwick's of Newcastle. *(After writing to the other side of the world, the last thing I expected was to get a letter from a fellow ex employee of Fenwick's. I was a Saturday lift boy, a job that had it's ups and downs.)* I grew up as one of six children of Annie Jane & James Dawson in Blythe, in a coal mining estate. My father was the Undertaker & caretaker for the Primitive Methodist Chapel.

I came to Australia in 1956. Fortunately I got in touch with relatives who paid my fare \$10 and put me up for the first week, and then I went to Sydney. I found a job in the first week and stayed with them for 24 years. The job was representative for Patons Wools. The nearest account was 150 miles away, meaning staying away in hotels at weekends. There is much that I could say about Australia, mostly 'good'. What you have my dear Nick... YOU HAVE

Came 3rd September 1939 when eleven o'clock in the morning war with Germany was declared. It was a beautiful Sunday and I had planned to cycle to the beach from my lodgings. When the broadcast ended I mounted my bike, not just then realising the seriousness of the news. Many people in London and elsewhere expected that there would be air raids at any minute, but that was not so.

On Monday morning at work, all talk was of the war and who had experienced war could enlighten others of what we might expect in the coming weeks. I talked to Mr Gallagher about joining up, he suggested trying all the officers caps to see how I looked, then maybe I could consider joining that particular service, but I was interested only in the Cavalry, and two weeks into the war I went along to the drill hall to join up.

Thinking back to the cash clothing company days - and this is important - Mother used to make me banana sandwiches and a flask of tea for lunch. I went upstairs to eat the sandwiches with Charlie Smith the photographer who had served in the British Cavalry in India. He vividly described in the cavalry, for instance, how mucking was done first thing in the morning and, if there wasn't a fork handy you just got on with it and picked up the sodden bedding with your hands. Well, this did not deter me as you will find in due course, on the contrary it fired my imagination.

Sweet are the memories of Bournemouth and sweeter still my friendship with Mavis. We danced at the YMCA, attended tea dances at the pavilion, rowed on the river Stour yet we were committed to each, but there was always a certain something between us that could'nt be ignored.

John Buckingham and his wife kept a riding school at Throop. John had been in the Household Cavalry and he further inspired me to think along the lines ultimately followed, and I should admit to copying his moustache, when at home with flu and found difficulty with shaving. The moustache is still there seventy years later. I went riding whatever the weather. Sometimes a Thursday with a weekend looming up, I would toss a coin. I had only two Shillings to bless myself with - heads I go, tails I don't. If it came down tails I still went.

It was with no immediate fear of the future that I strode briskly up Charminster Road to the drill hall in Holdenhurst. "Good evening" I said to the recruiting sergeant "I'd like to join the cavalry" I hastened to assure him. "Theres no cavalry these days" he said. "You could" but I interrupted him on a positive note "If I can't join the cavalry I won't join anything...at the moment", and left him with a courteous "Goodnight."

Next day I wrote to the commanding officer of the Royal Scots Greys asking whether I could join his regiment. A prompt reply thanking me for my interest and telling me that I would not be able to join a regiment direct, but that I might be accepted into the Cavalry Training Regiment. With that evidence I again presented myself at the drill hall and soon had a letter of introduction from a higher authority in Southampton, where the officer in charge gave me further information including a stand by order. A report date would be forwarded. it seemed I had to be patient for a few more weeks until a movement order and travel document arrived.

It didn't ever occur to me that I might be killed or maimed. Would I get a job when the war was over? Nothing like that entered my head....and there were thousands like me who simply joined up - that's what men and women did in those far off days.

Looking up my records I find that; I signed up on the 20th November 1939 into the Cavalry of the Line and was to report to the training regiment on the 15th December. I did! As the train pulled into the station at Colchester I spotted a Welsh Guardsman in grey overcoat that reached down almost to the ground and a cap, the style of which did not allow him to see anything in front unless he stood absolutely erect. He was directing movement, 'but he's not cavalry' I thought until I asked him "Do you have horses here?" "You'll ****ing well find out" - and I did. There were about 200. Phew, what a relief!

What followed next was to impress itself on my memory. We were ushered into the mess room and given a meal of jam and bread, currant cake and tea. That, my friends, was one of the best meals I have ever had. I had arrived, seen the barrack room I was to occupy, the stables... oh boy, I was in heaven!

At the time, there was much to 'take in' that I didn't give thought to the importance of Colchester. in brief, there was probably a settlement there in the 5th century BC. Roman invaders occupied Colchester in AD 43, until Queen Boadicea's command revolted against Roman rule, massacred the Roman occupants and destroyed the temple. However, I was oblivious to ancient history while being busily turned into a

twentieth century soldier to ride with sword against the German hordes.

December is a cold month in England. My second use of long johns was extremely vivid, when on the first full day we were issued with cotton drill work clothing and without those long johns I would have died. There is a long way to go before a 'rookie' feels and looks like a soldier. During the first week we were kitted out with everything. Khaki shirts, breeches, putties, spurs, side hat, bandolier, tin hat, jacket, cleaning kit, 'hussif' containing needle and thread etc. All that equipment had to be kept in prescribed order and available for spot inspection without notice. Rifle and sword warranted special attention. Our barrack room was above the stables. Spartan it was - a highly polished wooden floor that the day's barrack room orderly 'bumped up'. Beds of the convict era were folded and every piece of equipment laid out during the day.

As we were settling in, the first draft of recruits went on Christmas leave and we, hardly soldiers yet, were left behind to tend our horses. Reville (I didn't care for THAT trumpet sound on a freezing cold December morning) was at 6AM and we turned out immediately for roll call. First duty - feed and water the horses - horses were led out to the troughs while bedding was removed. Charlie Smith and picking up sodden bedding with your hands? It's true take it from me, for by now I had become Trooper Dawson W.

Our instructors were a lance corporal who although a 'God image' in breeches, putties and spurs was also a 'Jesus image' in his personal conduct with us individually. The sergeant for drill purposes was strict, efficient and gentlemanly. The squadron leader (name long since forgotten) appeared at parade time, but before this happened and after feed and water were ablutions and breakfast if there was time.

It was a real scramble to fit in everything. One had to decide whether, if there wasn't a wash basin free - should I go first to breakfast with the remains of sodden bedding beneath my finger nails, then wash and shave? Parade was at eight o'clock prompt. Imagine the rush... clean up, breakfast, prepare bed as prescribed, dress in breeches and putties (it was quite an art to wind those putties evenly around ones legs finishing at the tops of boots). Shirt, jacket with yellow lanyard on right shoulder, bandolier and cap, then to be available for the call "On parade"!

In the first few days and weeks our parades consisted of marching on the square to enthusiastic strains of a regimental brass band, saluting to the right, forming fours etc and all the complicated movements associated with discipline. We were taught dismounted sword drill, and for this purpose the order was 'from right of section to the front file', whereby we formed sufficient space around each of us to guarantee that no man would clip the ear of another man. We were ordered to take the stance of a soldier sitting in the saddle, to draw swords and await the next piece of training. The sergeant had a long pole with a leather bulbous end which he would thrust towards one of us and we were expected to parry. I was too busy watching out for the next thrust to think how different this was from selling hats at Austin Reeds.

I had my first Turkish bath at Nablus in Palestine. I'd seen such things at the pictures, but this was real and enjoyable too, especially as luxuries rarely came our way. There was a Mounted Palestine Police Unit near us, and we took every opportunity of

meeting the British constables to chat about their work and mainly to prolong the final day of parting with horses.

Jacob's Well was only a mile out of town and it would have been tragic not to see it. The story of the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at the well is told in John 4. There I stood, right where the conversation took place 2,000 years ago. Wasn't I lucky to be there and drink the water too.

In the middle of Syria is an old city, Palmyra is mentioned historically as a trading post and stopping off place in the marches of Alexander The Great. Now in 1941 it would be necessary to capture it from the Syrians, French or whoever was the dominating force and plans were made to do just that. The approach march in column was made at night - all night it took us, following the vehicle in front with no lights allowed. There at sunrise found us on a flat salt plain with Palmyra a few miles. It took us ten days to capture the town.

My travels in the 1939 war took me to Palestine, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Persia, Egypt, Italy, Sierra Leone, and Cape Town. On the way there, there was a Lance Corporal Riley on the ship's orderly room who was repeatedly being called over the tannoy, "Would Lance Corporal Riley of the ship's orderly room please report to the orderly room at once". Time after time during the day we'd hear this call. Did he exist? Had he fallen overboard?

. . . Bill Dawson

Dear Sir

I read your notice in the Sunday Mail, and thought that my story would be uninteresting. However, on second thoughts, as I am almost 85 years old, I realised that we are fast disappearing. I was 16 years old when the war broke out, living in Wareham, Dorset. I was very keen to join one of the services (probably the uniform was the main attraction). I had five brothers who eventually all served in the armed services. My father talked me out of joining up, because 'he and my mother had quite enough to worry about with the boys' being away. Also, my mother was not well. Reluctantly I went to work in the Royal Naval Cordite Factory, Holton Heath, which was just two miles from us.

I was there from 1941-45. It was hard work, as it was a mans job, all available men were of course conscripted. We women were not paid men's wages of course, but we were constantly reminded of how very fortunate we were, being paid ten shillings per week extra for danger money. We made the best of it of course, as everyone did in those days. We sang a lot and as it was shift work I was able to do my mother's shopping for her.

We often heard the German planes hovering overhead. One night a bomb was dropped on the car park, causing quite a bit of damage. The same night 3 bombs were dropped right in the middle of the factory, but fortunately did not explode. The bomb disposal boys dealt with them. Worrying times all right, but life went on. We still went

dancing and to the local pub for a sing song.

Yours Truly
Phyllis Farrington

Dear Nick,

On tidy up to eliminate, I found a small cutting hence a belated reply I joined the Bucks Bn O.B.L.I (Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry) May 8th, 1939. Now by time coincidence 70 years have passed me by.

The 43rd becoming a very early part of the now famous 6th Airborne, recruited from all Bn/s for jumpers and glider pilots, my application was refused being then a weapons and tactics instructor stationed then at Enniskillen, Northern Ireland where we had been since mid 1940, as the south was neutral. The Channel Islands occupied and the German Embassy in Dublin, left the Irish Sea open to invasion. We eventually returned to various stations along the south coast after a short leave.

It was at Sandwich or Deal that I won my cruise on the Mediterranean, busted back to corporal for gross insubordination. Joining the 2nd Kings (Liverpool) at Cassino with restoration of rank. By luck of the draw not committed as they lost 56 plus K.I.A. We continued up through Italy almost to the river Po. By then under strength and weary we were withdrawn to Torronto for rest and re-group in Palestine. Most of the time during our advancing I was platoon commander after losing two officers within hours. The third, a Mr Cotgreave, a field commissioned Sgt gunner, an ex ranker, so we worked well together.

Airborne and jubilant that we were being flown to wine, women and song, until the pilot informed us we were going to Athens and may get shot at going into land, causing an emphatic use of an explicit word, (like a certain cook). The street fighting was vicious, then finally a peaceful situation. It was here that Billy Williams and myself with four other sergeants from the brigade were seconded to the Greek army as instructors, with our own personal interpreter. I was promoted and recalled taking over my company and later shipped to Salonika on the Orontes, the same ship to bring me to Australia ten years later. After almost seven years I was demobbed and retrained as a bricklayer, a took a building diploma but never became a builder.

On self analysing I think my previous responsibilities played a big part, plus the inner turbulence. I just had to keep moving trying to make up for those lost years. I joined the T.A in 1947 serving another 9 years.

Several things prompted me to migrate. The inner turbulence making me a workaholic, the timely visit of two Australian cousins, the Berlin airlift, plus being frozen out for five weeks and the influx of Jamaicans shuffling about. I was greeted on the dock by uncles, aunts and eight cousins, before moving off through the system. Never out of work, word of mouth kept me going as by this time I was well qualified to

undertake anything that paid my price.

I have lived in Bright N.E Victoria for some 32 years, a wonderful part of the country. Have written my life story in segments, Italy & Greece, with two abbreviated copies and eight original photos now lodged with the Museum of Life (Liverpool) for safekeeping.

I backpacked in '93, a month in Greece, one in Italy, one in the UK, mainly paying my respects to those who never made it home, standing in almost the same spot I was wounded the second time, losing my argument with a bloody big Tiger tank.

I have no interest in the UK anymore. I found that in '93 I was dirt in my homeland, disgusted by an incident at a bus station with a WHAT??? So with the best wishes for you and yours, I close now from a frosty morning to a sunny day but no rain in sight.

Most Sincerely

Chas Cooper

p.s As a member of the R.S.L polished and scrubbed up, I parade with my counterparts every Anzac Day. Incredible the reception from the crowd as we march to the ceremony in the town centre, wheelchairs to the front. Nosh up provided by Rotary. Nov 11th, solemn but less formal. One member has just returned from Harefield, UK. He had visited St Mary's and said everyone of the 112 Aus headstones had flowers on, put there by schoolchildren who have marched and paid this tribute since 1921. Tried for an honorary award of Australia for this act of devotion without success I might add.

p.p.s We visit the school here where the students big and very small read out their prepared papers on their impressions of ANZAC. Lets hope they do not become gun fodder.

To Nick Pringle

After reading your letter here in 'Kingston C' Hobart. I am sending you details about my late husband Cyril. He was always at the meetings with his mates he went away with and in the Anzac Day marches. He passed away 14 Nov '01.

From Isobel

(A postcard from the past, Cyril Sweet writing home to folks Down Under)

England, 1940

This photo of Salisbury Lane is between a nest of villages, Over Wallop, Nether Wallop, Middle Wallop. I have often walked down this lane, a beautiful walk it is too my cobbles and I often walk here of a night.

C Sweet

(After being in England during the Battle of Britain, where his camp on Salisbury Plain was strafed and bombed, Cyril 'Sweetie Pie' Sweet as part of the Australian Imperial Force fought in the North Africa campaign and became a 'Rat of Tobruk', then served in Syria. At the age of 22 he was closer to home fighting the Japanese at the Battle of Milne Bay in New Guinea.)

"In Tobruk we had artillery, planes and mortars, but in New Guinea it was more or less against an individual, not an army. You never knew where the next bullet was coming from. We went into the attack and were driving them back and a fellow came staggering through the jungle with a great hole in his stomach. A mate and I dragged him about 500 yards to the shore.

(As Cyril helped move the casualty he noticed a movement in the foliage and was shot in the hand by a sniper. He was evacuated for treatment. The Battle of Milne Bay which took place between August 24th and 7th September 1942 involved 8,000 Australian soldiers repelling an all out attack on Milne Bay by the Japanese who were aiming to capture the airfields as part of their advance towards North Australia. It was the first land defeat of the Japanese Army in the Pacific during World War Two.)

From
Isobel

Nick Pringle

Re; Your letter in the Fifty Plus Mag. I served in the Aust A.I.F Army. Went to New Guinea, New Britain. 18 months New Guinea, 12 months New Britain. When we landed in N.G, next day to brought up to battle strength, they called for volunteers for med orderly and stretcher bearers. That's what I was for the whole service. Got 2 stripes to corporal.

Born Kent 1917, went to Waingot St State School. Dad worked for Froydsberry Dockland. Left Eng. 1926, landed in Australia 28th April, my birthday. Went to school, left when I was 14. Had two jobs, finished up in a lolly factory for 25 years.

My family; mum and dad, two brothers. The eldest was attached to American Army, map making. Youngest, one of the Rats of Tobruk. Got washed off a destroyer, picked up by a merchant ship, arrived home safe, passed away 2 months ago. See by my birth date I'll be 91 this year. People always comment on how well I look, my comment "It's the Pommy blood in me." Still a member of the R.S.L, Kangaroo Flat, approx 140 miles from Melbourne. One of our members is Bob Pringle. Discharged 21st June 1946. Total 1,604 days. I am now an extremely disabled War Vet, but going along fine. 3 family, 7 grand and 3 great grand. Wife too.

Left England? Dads mother lived out here, that's where we lived. This isn't the Australia that we knew. Population grown out of control, roughies, hoons attacking

elderly women. It just isn't the country we was brought up in. England? We came back in 1978 first and last time. Had a real good trip.

I have invasion money the Japs had for when they took over Australia, Surrender notices, photos and bad and good memories. I can name 5 times I shouldn't be here if it wasn't for the good Lord.

Yours Sincerely
Cec Shilling
Cheers, All the best.

Dear Nick

I just read your passage in the Kingston Classified. I was a member in 466 Squadron, RAAF, stationed in Driffield, Yorkshire. I just had an invitation to our re-union in Sydney next month. It may be our last as our numbers are badly diminished. We are all in our late 80's now.

I am a descendant of the First Fleeters, (*The approximate 1,487 people who were aboard the the 11 ships which sailed from Great Britain on 13 May 1787, to establish the first European colony in Australia.*) so had an interest in Old Blighty. I was glad to have a chance to see the old country, even though it had its dangers. At D-Day there were 14,000 members of RAAF (*Royal Australian Air Force*) in England. 2,000 were ground staff and 6,500 were killed, so that is over 50% of air crew.

The prettiest part I thought was the Lakelands. I was stationed at Millom, and named my house 'Windermere'. We were of course well welcomed in England, but could not believe how your houses were built right up to the pavement, with no front gardens, and rows of houses all joined together in one building!!

My daughter lives there and says they had to pay twice as much as they received for their Melbourne house, but it was half the size of their own. I live on 1/4 of an acre overlooking a golf course. Let me know if you come out this way.

Yours etc
Davys Baldwin

Dear Mr Pringle,

At the fall of Singapore I was a 17 year old Australian soldier serving with the 2/19 Btn 8th Div.(Lieut. General Bennett). I first worked on the wharves, thence on the Burma- Thai Railway Line including "Hellfire Pass". We returned to Singapore when the line was finished. Eventually those of us who looked healthy were destined for the coalmines in Japan. We sailed on the "Byoki Maru" & experienced a typhoon on the way. We arrived at Moji Wharf after 70 days. My group under Major Reg Newton was destined to Ohamma Camp already occupied by the British. They already had any so

called "cushy jobs". We got on well with them & they taught us to be miners. This was essential as it was a dangerous mine. I belonged to a shift that consisted of a Pommie who always sang a song walking out of the mine after work. It went ?? "She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes" or "I was coming round the mountain doing ninety miles an hour when the chain on my bicycle broke" sung to the tune of "Walbash Cannon Ball".

They were a good mob those Pommies.

Kind Regards,
Cliff Lowien

1. What was it like when Singapore fell, was there much panic. How did the British ex pats cope etc.
2. Can you tell me a bit more about the working conditions on the Burma Railway and how you got through the days and how the lads kept their chins up?
3. How did you find the Japanese, was the experience as bad as many of the movies made since show. Did you witness any mistreatment? Did many of your mates lose their lives and do you have any memories of these people?
4. Your Journey on the Byoki Maru didn't exactly sound like a trip on the QE2, what were conditions like on board?
5. What was life like in Japan and do you have any more tales of the poms and the aussies working together?
6. How were you liberated, what happened to your captors and how did you get back to Oz?
7. How did you manage after the war, how did you manage to get over such a harrowing experience?
8. Have you forgiven the Japanese?
9. Many of the UK veterans have gave their opinions on the UK today. Do you have any opinions of life in Australia 67 years after the end of WW2

Dear Nick,

When Singapore fell I didn't observe much panic. The Chinese were naturally frightened and had good reason to be. I didn't see many "British Ex Pats" after the surrender. Actually my Btn -commanded by Colonel C. Anderson V.C. M.C.- were expecting a counter attack.

Working conditions were atrocious especially during the wet season.

Pure mateship and a determination not to let the little ***** bastards get the best of you. Lack of food, medicine and work from sunup to sundown and sometimes well into the night were not for the weak of fortitude.

The Japanese were evil enough but worse were the Korean guards who were well down the Jap hierarchy. I received many bashings and lost friends of whom I still have fond memories. I witnessed the death of a friend in Japan and was partly instrumental in having the guard hanged after the war. No movie has come close to

showing the sheer suffering of it all.

During the construction of the Burma Railway loss of life was far less than the "Poms". This was because we really looked after one another. If possible no man was let to die without holding the hand of a friend.

Actually the proper name of the "Byoki Maru" was "Rashin Maru". We named her "Byoki-Jap for sick. She was originally built in Canada in 1917 and named "Canadian Prince"-5500 tons displacement. She was bombed and burnt out in Feb. 1942. She was patched up and took 1250 P.O.W's to Japan. The time taken - 1st July to 6th Sept. 1944. One task on the trip was to rid the ship of flies which was OK when the flies were abundant. When they became scarce we started dissecting them. The Japs eventually woke up. The ship became clear of flies.

When we were told in Ohamma "War Finished" mates from another camp commandeered a truck-found a brewery-stacked the truck with beer-signed the chit General Blamey(Aust) and came to visit us.

I came home on the USS Formidable to Manilla then HMS Speaker to Sydney. Being young I decided after the war to blank it out of my mind. Studied Civil Engineering until I missed lectures due to war caused illness. Married one of the nurses and ended up on the land. Grew various crops including wheat, barley, sorghum, sunflower etc. Raised sheep, cattle,pigs and ran a thoroughbred racehorse stud.

I got over the war by being young and busy. I don't hate the Japs. Hate is negative but I haven't forgotten.

The whole world has changed since the end of the World War 2. For the better?? I leave it for you to judge. Sometimes I wonder.

Good luck
Regards Cliff

Can you explain a bit more about being prisoner, what time did you have to get up, what was your food, did you get any breaks, how did you keep yourselves from going round the twist, songs, what used to upset the Japanese and what punishments did they give out, were malaria, dysentery a big problem?etc.

Can you explain more about what happened to your friend, the circumstances and how you helped to have the guard brought to justice?

Dear Nick,
Answering your further questions.
Yes that is the 2/19th Btn Colonel Charles Anderson's medals. After returning home he later became a successful member of Parliament.

As a P.O.W I worked on three types of jobs.
No 1- Wharves on Singapore Harbour- rating 10/10
No 2-Burma Thai Railway- rating 0/10
No 3-Coalmine in Japan- rating 5/10

Work times on the wharves- quite good

Work times on the Railway- daylight to dark and then some more.

Coalmine -shift work.

Food on the wharves-excellent because of what we could scrounge. On the railway food consisted of a little rice and watery stew. Sometimes a few head of skinny cattle destined for the Jap Camp would be yarded overnight. We always made sure there was one that couldn't walk next morning. That way our guards got a good feed and at least we got the offal. Coalmine food was fair but small in quantity. One time when I was ill I had the light duty job of being personal slave to the Jap engineers. By stealing small amounts of their horded food I was never detected. My main job was to have a series of 44 gal drums of warm water ready for them to soak in when they came home from work. I had a helper one day and forgot to tell him of the required heat. He used too much fire. The Jap jumped in and came out of the drum like a rocket. Unfortunately my helper copped a hell of a hiding.

Go slow tactics really upset the Japs. One punishment the Japs were fond of was to get the victim to kneel down and place a piece of wood at the rear and between the knees. Malaria, dysentery, cholera, tropical ulcers on the leg and beri beri were our biggest medical problems.

My mate Doug Craig on returning from work in the mine did not number correctly (in Japanese). He was savagely bashed and forced to strip naked and kneel in front of the guardhouse in the snow which fell all night- in the morning he was dead. On further research I have found that 2 guards disappeared and the one arrested died before he could be tried. I declined to go back to Japan to give evidence, so it was verbal and photographic. People may think it hard to differentiate between Orientals but it is not if you have lived with them. A day after surrender mate at another camp fell out of a top sleeping bunk and was killed.

15th February. Just laid a wreath at the local Cenotaph in memory of those who lost their lives in Malaya and Singapore. In attendance was a lady who lost three brothers K.I.A.

Speaking of horses I stood an Irish stallion-

Lad's Love by Tudor Melody out of Goldwyn Girl.

At one stage he was the leading sire of 2 Yr Olds (Aust) and leading brood mare sire.

Kind Regards and good luck,
Cliff

Dear Mr Pringle

My husband was in the R.A.N (Royal Australian Navy) for five years and I was in the W.R.A.N.S for 2 1/2 years, that's how we met. At H.M.A.S Cerberus at Crile Point, the largest naval training centre in Australia. We were married whilst we were in the Navy. Then he was sent up to the Solomon Islands. I enjoyed Navy life.

My husband died 12 years ago and I received a war widows pension. I have five

children including twin sons and ten grandchildren. I have ties with Great Britain as my mother came from Peterborough and my father from Edinburgh. My father was a member of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and fought in W.W.1, winning the Military Medal. I am an Australian. I was once a proud Aussie and grew up in a wonderful country, but not any more. We have far too many migrants that are not interested in getting to know us or obeying our rules. The crime rate has risen alarmingly. I would not travel on any form of transport on my own, not even in day time. I am 83 years old and hate being old, but I grew up in a much better era and had a safe, happy life. My worry now is for my grandchildren as to what their adult life will be like. Thanks for giving me the chance to write to you and express my thoughts.

Yours Faithfully
Margaret E. Delves

Dear Nick

I had a small cutting sent to me by an old Ex-Pat friend - So, here is my story. Born in Devonshire in 1919 I grew up in the usual fashion of those times and eventually left Grammar School at 14 years - education uncompleted due to health reasons - became an apprenticed Electrician for five years and passed it with flying colours, later becoming 'Installation Inspector' with the South Western Electric.

Due to family arrangements I moved to London NW10 - staying in the trade until the grumbling of war spoilt it all. I decided that I would choose the service I liked best and enlisted at Chatham - the little known 'Fleet Air Arm' as an Aircraft Electrical Fitter - to train at RAF Station Lympne - right opposite the Dunkirk area - so it was 'Everybody Out' to a lovely town in Staffordshire - Newcastle Under Lyme, where we completed our training and I met my future wife Gwen.

In due course we were allocated a ship - mine being HMS Cornwall, a heavy cruiser, but, she was in the Indian Ocean. So a long sea voyage finally got me to Kapstad - or Cape Town to await our connection. Soon made friends with locals - very friendly folk, eventually had to go by train to Durban. What an experience, 3 days and 2 nights with another wait, more friendly folk and I got to know the country quite well. Eventually considering it as a place to live.

We finally boarded the Cornwall and sailed some thousands of miles in the Indian Ocean and visited Perth, West Australia - I really liked the country as it was then. The Cornwall was sunk but I survived! (*The HMS Cornwall along with HMS - was dive bombed by 60 Japanese planes and surviving crew were in shark infested water for 30 hours before rescue came.*)

Finally the war was over - I returned to the UK. Gwen and I were married and settled down in Devon, but the 'Oz' bug had bitten me and after a 'sponsorship offer' we sold up and came to N-S-Wales, lovely but it did get extremely hot and humid - so did some holiday trips in cooler places. Started work as an Electrical Fitter and

eventually became an electrical engineer at a small hydro power station where I stayed until I had the misfortune to slip down the concrete steps and ended up with a special operation and retirement. Visited friends in Adelaide one year and liked it so much we decided to move. - Glad we did - much nicer climate.

Gwen and I did a couple of round the world trips - one via Canada & The Youkon, lovely. Second trip via the USA and Grand Canyon, superb scenery but did not care for the people or their way of life.

My feelings are now that Australia is becoming 'Americanised' far too quickly - even the national news and TV is so full of 'US goings on' I wonder if they bought shares? Plenty of local news and world news to report on. I have not been in the UK since 1995 so have not much knowledge, but Australia with it seems, an open door to anyone has become far too 'cosmopolitan'. I shall see my days out here, it still has a lot to offer, but it is NOT the country we came to all those 54 years ago.

Sincerely
Eric Burnett

Dear Nick

During the war 1939-1945 I was at Nailsworth school. I was asked whether I would like to become a member of the A.R.P, I agreed, then I became a member and I was supplied with an A.R.P armband, a gas mask and a steel helmet. I then had to cover an area from the Northern Hotel Enfield to the Windsor Hotel on North East Road. Members of the A.R.P had to report to the warden about electricity failure, water, gas failure. Before sunset all blinds had to be drawn in houses and buildings.

I was then offered a job on a hospital ship. I think the name of the ship was 'Marunda', bombed by the Japanese in Darwin harbour. I was then asked if I would agree to work weekends at General Motors Holden, filling 70 pound sugar bags with sand which were then stitched up by adults and stacked up on the outside of Holdens factory from the ground up to the roof gutters.

On North Terrace Adelaide there were several concrete pipes about 5 or 6 ft in diameter. If there was an air raid people had to step inside for safety. To celebrate the end of the war, thousands of people gathered in the city. There was a lot of police on white horses and women would put lipstick on the horses. Just to top off, on North Terrace several weighing machines which had a sign 'WOMEN ONLY' Once a woman got on the weighing machine, a recorded sound would say "Only one at a time please!".

Kindest Regards to you and your family
Frank Eckert

(An original letter sent from Clarence Valley RAAF Association from one of its past members)

Sgt Ford A.A C/o Base PO R.A.A.F Overseas HQ
Kodak House, Kingsway, London
(Headed note paper address)
Regent Palace Hotel, Picadilly Circus
London, W1
Telephone - REGENT 7000
Telegram - UNTIPPABLE, PICCY, LONDON

11-5-43

Dear Mum

Just to let you see I am doing pretty good, and to make the most use of this flash paper before I leave. I am going along to Hampshire tomorrow to Mrs Newmans and to Bournemouth to get in a few dancing hours.

We have twenty one days leave, but used half the first one getting clearances, about thirty signatures to get. My pilot and wireless op are about somewhere, but I have not seen them since this morning. They were still in bed, and I wanted to go out to Kensington to see the museum there. Quite a fair place it is too, not crowded like most of them, but of course a lot of stuff has been shifted and the greater part was closed up. The art gallery is the same, only a collection of wartime stuff, and the zoo too, where I went this afternoon though there is plenty left. The parrot house is the noisiest place going, and the bird collections generally good, even an old Magpie and some Kookaburras.

I also went through Hyde Park, looking great now, the Chestnuts flowering and pink Hawthorn, and all the new trees in leaf. I was on my own or I would have had a shot at rowing on the Serpentine (lake), as a lot were. One canny lad had a couple of girls doing the work for him, and there was a goofy dog in one place, swimming around in circles, snapping at the water it splashed up in front.

I have been trying to buy a pea rifle, but the best I can do is a target rifle at 13 Guineas, but I have just paid in £35 (Stirling) to my saving bank account at home, which should arrive about the same time as this. Anyhow, it leaves me with about £20 and most of my leave to go, though I shan't spend much once I leave here. The last mail I received was some time ago, and I fear those parcels have gone west. It is now about seven months since you sent them. However, we have done well enough out of the A.C.F. I gave my sheepskin away to Jock, one of the W/Ops in the hut, and he has told me to look up his place in Perthshire, if I go to Scotland. So I must try for that too.

Well, some old dame has just swiped the last few envelopes left here, so I shall have to come again in the morning, or get one off the boys. We get along fairly well, but have practically a beaten path from here, down through Leicester Square and along the Strand to the Boomerang Club. Jack (the pilot) takes a lot of shaking out of his groove. We saw 'Gone with the Wind', fair enough but not worth what we paid.

Things finished up well enough at the camp, except that the Benevolent Fund gained 7/6 over three maps I was short, and I bounced my £22 astro-watch off the cement floor in front of the squadron leader as I was handing my stuff in. Fortunately

he let me off. Otherwise, I finished well, actually doing stores out of two collars, or rather Ray (the wireless op) did. I might as well tell you the crew before I go any further, to save explanation. There is the pilot, Jack Perkins, bomb aimer, Danny Meyer; Wireless Operator Ray Seabrook and the rear gunner, little Scotty McLay. So now I hope you know.

Well I can't think of anything more for the moment, I will send further instalments as leave progresses. I hope you are all doing well. It would be nice to race this home and do over the Japs with some real planes for a change, not this high flying Yank day stuff.

Love to all from Arty.

Dear Mr Pringle

Your request for WWII vets to write in has been drawn to my attention. Just turned 85, born in Scotland. Started in early '42 as a gunner, discharged as a Captain in '46, service in M.E and Italy on 25 pounder field artillery, Served through the Italian campaign with the Newfoundland Regiment, which included 3 of the 4 battles for Cassino. Too young to be discharged at the end of hostilities, so served final year in the Indian army on the North West Frontier.

I left UK in 1967 with my family for better opportunities with no regrets, particularly from my children who wouldn't wish to be anywhere else. I have been back several times, and this has reinforced the view that the move was more than successful.

I am extremely saddened by the state of affairs now in the UK. Immigration (without integration) has been unchecked for many years. The rise of the uncompromising Islamic faith must be a real concern for many of the older residents, and this is in fact said to me by life long friends, some of whom wish they had done the same move as we had.

Yours Sincerely

Ronald Blake

Hullo Nick

My brother Len, RAAF 403246, was one of the 'Noble 600', the 600 or so RAAF who were sent to Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, for their flight training.

Some years ago I prepared the enclosed book from letters he wrote while on training and on active service and other letters to my parents.

The letter from Sgt Pilot Neil Robertson, is particularly poignant as he was shot down and killed over the English Channel some nine months later.

Sometime after publishing this book, I managed to track down the girls Len and

Mac had met in Salisbury, no easy task as they had married, moved away, then back to Zimbabwe.

They were delightful girls, (women) Sally Carter and the twins, Peggy and Betty Morris and I could see why Len and Mac enjoyed their company. I managed to find some of Mac's relatives in Sydney and they told me Mac had hoped to return to Rhodesia and marry Sally, but he was killed three months after Len.

The introduction by Lord Shackleton was pertinent as he was Flight Lieutenant Shackleton RAF, intelligence officer at St Eval when Len was stationed there.

Regards
Keith Williams

(Keith Williams book is called 'Letters to Mother' ISBN 0 64600037 3. His older brother, Len, decided instead of keeping a diary he would write regular letters to his mother and asked her to keep them as record of his time in the RAAF. The letters to home start on his journey to Rhodesia for pilot training and record his time learning to fly there and then on active service as a pilot in 58 Squadron, which was part of Coastal Command on anti submarine patrols in the seas surrounding the British Isles. His first letter to his mother was dated 12th April 1941 and his last letter home was dated 13th July 1942. Using Len's letter to their mother, Keith has created a book that is a wonderful read and a moving tribute to his older brother.)

DAILY OPERATIONS BOOK 58 SQUADRON

On 28th July ten aircraft were detached to RAF Station Wick, Scotland for special duty.

06/08/42 Whitley Mk. V11 Z9529 (J) Flt. Sgt. Strutt, Sgt Williams, Sgt. Morgan, Sgt. Prior, Sgt. Hooper, Sgt Griffiths

UP - 12.15

DOWN --

Anti submarine patrol in Northern waters. Missing on operations.

07/08/42 Whitley Mk. V11 BD429 (B) PO Birch, PO Norton, Sgt. Hale, Sgt. Cawthorne, Sgt Rice, Sgt. Oliver

UP - 05.30

DOWN - 10.30

Air sea rescue, no sightings. Nothing to report.

(On the morning of the 6th August, 1942 in Australia, Lens mother sat down to write him a letter. With the 11 hour time difference, it is likely that as she wrote he was asleep in Scotland, the last night of his life. Her beloved son Len took off at 12.15 in the afternoon, for what would be his final journey. His plane ditched into the North Sea..... on his 21st birthday.)

Lessness
50 Flers Avenue

Earlwood
6th August 1942

My Dear Boy

You are twenty one today, it's a lovely day here. I am sitting on the bed on the front verandah where I can look at your photo on the wireless as I write to you. It is about ten o'clock in the morning and I'm glad to get in the sun to get a bit warm. I'm just wondering how you are spending the day son, whether you are flat out to it or whether it is your day off, but even so you wouldn't have much time to go anywhere in a day. I can remember my twenty first birthday so well, I went to work as usual and then I went into my bedroom in the evening there was a parcel on my box and it was a leather handbag which I still have. That was all I had to remind me of my birthday, you see it was wartime (*World War One*) then and you could not buy things not even cakes then, but we will make it up to you when you come home.

I think I told you in my last letter, every day makes a difference and brings it a day nearer for your coming home. I musn't say things that will make you home sick, I try not to but I wouldn't like you to think that we don't think of you son, indeed I woke Dad before two o'clock this morning and my thoughts were of you. There is a harvest tune just coming over the wireless, 'Bringing in the sheaves' and it reminds me it is harvest time where you are now. Have you enjoyed the summer son, or have you been too busy to notice. I'm so looking forward to a letter from you to see if you remark on the lovely countryside over there. I saw Mrs Renshaw yesterday. She wasn't very well, but she sends the best of everything for your birthday. Well son, I'm loath to leave you this morning but I had to have this little chat although it's only on paper, I never was one for much talking, I think Dad does enough for us both. I will ask Dad to get another film for his camera and take some more snaps. I hope you get the mail fairly often, we sent you another cable this week and by now you should have had the last photos we sent you. I can smell the dinner cooking, a stew, because I will be going out. Well Lennie I think I will say cheerio and may you be as happy as can be, perhaps before you have another birthday we may see you. Our thoughts are with you so much, God be with you very much and keep you always.

Much love and thoughts for you now and when the mail is a long time in between, remember we are thinking of you all the time. Mum xxxxxxxx A big one for your birthday son XXXXX Love to the Home Folks if you see them. (*Len's mothers parents and family. She was originally from Kent*) The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace.

(*Her letter was marked 'RETURN TO SENDER'*)

Australia RAAF 401141
Sergeant Pilot Robertson N.F
C/- Kodak House, Kingsway, London

18th October 1942

Dear Mrs Williams

It is with my deepest regret that I write this and offer my sincerest sympathy to you and your family in your sad loss. I had known Len for a considerable time and liked him immensely. Although I was not on the Squadron at the time he was missing, I had been sharing a room with him prior to my temporary detachment, and it was a great shock on returning to hear the sad news.

But what finer death could you ask than that in the service of our country. Unfortunately this is the price that many, many fine chaps must pay to assure a future world that will be worth living in.

If there is anything, no matter how small, I can do for you, please don't hesitate to write or telegraph to me, and I will be only too pleased to do what I can.

We must all be brave and bear our losses with courage for we all believe as has been so admirably expressed in verse,

No one knows the future
No one knows what lies in store,
But I believe, that someday somewhere,
We shall meet again once more.
This is the hope, that lifts my spirits high
On hope's bright wings,
That we are moving, towards
Happier brighter things.

Yours very sincerely

Neil F. Robertson.

(Pilot Officer Neil F Robertson died aged 22 on the 7th May 1943. He is remembered alongside Sgt. Len Williams on the Runnymede Memorial, which commemorates over twenty thousand aircrew from Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe who flew on operations from bases in the United Kingdom, North and West Europe and who have no known grave.)

Dear Mr Pringle

We read your article in the CAN YOU HELP column of the Sunday Mail from Adelaide. We get it delivered every Sunday. My husband, Jim (James Arthur) Lydeamore was in the RAAF and joined up in 1940. He is now 86 years old. He was one of ten children in the family and four sons were in the RAAF and their fathers grandson, Alwyn Lydeamore was accepted for that service as well. How about that!

Their brother Herbert Berry Lydeamore was in the Sunderland flying boat that was hit by a submarine in the Bay of Biscay on August 1st 1943. His body was never

recovered.

BERTS DEATH

(On a patrol over the Bay of Biscay the Sunderland of 10 Squadron RAAF spotted a fully surfaced U-boat, U-454, that was about to launch torpedoes at a British convoy. The captain of the plane, Flight Lieutenant Bob Fry, made a tight turn and dived into an attack. The U-boat opened fire with guns and hit both engines. A shell hit the fuel tank which drenched the plane in burning fuel and flames. The captain did not waver and dropped the depth charges close to the U-boat, resulting in its destruction.)

“After we had been hit and had attacked the sub the aircraft began to go into a dive and got out of control. The two pilots were killed and the captain wounded in the stomach. Petrol was flowing everywhere, for we had been hit badly in the fuel tanks. The captain called us into crash positions, but owing to the petrol on the floor some of us were unable to make it. When we hit the water I was standing near Bert. I was blown through the astrodome and landed clear of the wreckage. We were in the water about 45 minutes, and during that time saw none of the remainder of the crew.

When we were picked up by the ship we were told that we were very lucky to be alive, because when we hit the sea two depth charges went off. There was no earthly chance that Bert or anyone else was picked up by another ship.” Flying Officer P. Petterson

“Bert had only two trips to make before finishing his tour of ops. He did a grand job. There was not a thing that he did not know about engines, and he always had his gear up to A1 standard. Really he was the mainstay of our crew, and only for him quite often we should have been left in bed. There was six of us lucky enough to get out the ditching, but unfortunately the other six went down with the ship. The last time I saw Bert he was handing out Mae Wests (*Inflatable life jackets, named after the film star's ample bosom*) to the other blokes. There was not really a chance to do anything, for the plane sank almost as soon as it hit the sea. It has been officially announced that Coastal Command has credited us with a ‘kill’ for the U-boat. They came off worse, as they saved only seven of their crew, while we saved 50 per cent of ours.” Flight Sergeant P.E Cook.

“Your son had given sterling service with us. I was always hearing glowing reports from his captain of his work and efficiency. That was borne out by the fact that his aircraft was one of the most efficient in the squadron. He had won our respect and was held in high esteem by all of us. He has given his life for a great cause, and we who are left can draw inspiration from his sacrifice.” Bert’s commanding officer

(Another of the six survivors of the attack, John Portus, was pulled aboard the sloop, HMS Kite, from the waters semi conscious and was awarded a DFC for his role in this and other operations. He later said the crew that had survived all believed K.G ‘Bob’ Fry, 29, should have won a

posthumous VC for his bravery. He was however Mentioned in Despatches. Bert Lydeamore, son of Nellie & George Lydeamore, was killed aged 30. He has no known grave, but is remembered on panel 196 of the Runnymede memorial.)

Jim went round to Darwin on a troopship and was put with the British squadron, 'A' Flight 54 Squadron RAF, as a transport driver. (Spitfire squadron) The scorpions in the desert were huge! In December '45 Jim was discharged, and came back to Port Pirie, South Australia. We are born and bred Aussies but had family in England. Jim's mother was from Pimlico, London and both my parents came from there. In 1974 we went to see all our relatives that were still living. Great excitement, and we went to Newcastle Upon Tyne, so we've been there.

Yours Faithfully
From Judy & Jim Lydeamore

Dear Nick

You wrote to our 'Kingston Classifieds'. I was Joan Moore when I joined the Woman's Land Army in 1940. I worked on a farm at Thirsk in Yorkshire for a short time. Then to a hostel at Dishforth. Thereafter, with six other girls I went to work for Mr Squires at Norton-Le-Clay. We lived in a cottage called Bagwash and bag washing was part of our general farm work duties. After a tractor accident and three months in hospital I convalesced at Rest Break House, Torquay. I then became a forewoman at the Guisborough hostel and organised the work for 30 girls until the war ended.

I now live in Tasmania (since 1956) and have a large family. When I was released from the W.L.A in 1947 I married Tony Ellis. We lived in Wales before we decided to emigrate. One of the reasons was that Tony was a keen amateur astronomer. (He was a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society) and wanted to study the stars of the Southern Hemisphere. By this time we had two children so it was quite an adventure to leave. We took only two telescopes, some toys and very little money. No Chattels.

Our assisted passage took five weeks and cost us ten pounds each. We were accommodated in a transit hostel on our arrival in Melbourne. We did not like the hostel and Tony soon flew to Tasmania to ascertain the suitability for us. He came back and declared that the state was breathtaking. So off we went in an old ferry boat called the 'Taroona' towards a new home.

In 1988 I spent three months camping around Australia and drove 18,000kms. We visited Adelaide, Alice Springs, Darwin, Cairns and many lesser known places. I could write much more but to sum up my life since leaving the W.L.A has at times involved very hard work but the gains have outweighed the hardships. I am still proud of my Yorkshire background but do not regret emigrating in any way to Australia, especially Tasmania. I am an Australian citizen and consider I belong. Above all I am pleased my descendants are achieving so much.

Yours Sincerely
Joan Swain

NEW ZEALAND

Dear Nick

Re article in Manawatu Standard
Life in UK in 1920's

This was a tough time in England still reeling from the awful time of war 1914-1918 and for an ever growing family, very hard times indeed. But we were a very happy family and helping one another we got through the worst of times.

We changed to a larger house on a regular basis as our family grew. The General Strike of 1926 I think when all work stopped for 6 months was very hard. But as soon as you reached eight years old or nine some little jobs, which earned a few shillings, helped to see us through.

Mother made huge stockpots of the best of soups you could dream of and with dumplings on the top. What a wonderful woman.

When the clouds of war gathered in 1939 we were called to battle in 1940.

Call up came quickly and April 1940 it was off to training at New Brancepath and a dawn to dusk routine. (*Born in North Tyneside, Bob Rogers served in the 8th Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry*). It was hectic, but it matched the goings on in France and ended at Dunquirke with England was back to the wall. Training 8th Battalion at Honiton Devon, we were soon hard at work getting to know the tough training of the foot soldier. But by 04/04/41 we were soon off to Egypt and then Cyprus as the Germans had captured Crete and Cyprus seemed the next step on the way to the Middle East oilfields. Next step off we went to the far North of Iraq to bar the way to the oil fields of that area.

From the sunny climes of Cyprus to the snow clad mountains was a big shock as we just had tents to sleep in. The conditions were very harsh and we were not well clothed for these conditions. So in February 1942 it was once again on the move to a warmer climate as it was to Egypt and Libya, here we come!

For five months it was variety of life out in the middle of the night uplifting mines or a duty on the listening post. My last duty on that job was a real cracker, rounding up a large group of Italian prisoners, being fiercely strafed by Italian planes, shelled by a very large tank, finally being left behind when the outpost was abandoned. What a couple of days that was! Finally reached El Alemein and was promptly moved from HQ to B Company and back into action once again. After 12 hours of fierce action, we were rounded up by German tanks and ended in a hell hole of dysentery "The Palms".

A short stay of two weeks and we were packed into an Italian ship the "Nino Bixio" six holds, packed like sardines, 500 in each, 3000 in total. Approaching the coast of Greece we were hit by two torpedoes from a British submarine "Turbulent". I was in the lower half of No 1 hold. Of the 250 in the lower half only 3 survived and myself and mate Private Johnny Mellor survived a really horrible nightmare experience. Every stitch of clothing was blown off me. All I had on was two pockets and a collar.

Bits and pieces of men were everywhere and the only first aid was a medical orderly from Dunston who toiled through the night. He said to me to go and find sheets, pillow cases, anything to cover the bare flesh. He was wonderful and deserved recognition for his efforts, but he was never rewarded. All in all 400 died and it was so unnecessary as they knew all North bound ships were carrying POWs.

Over 2000 men on different ships died at the hands of our own navy. The ship was towed to Greece and ran ashore in a tiny port Navarino. Eventually we reached Italy and a slimming experience from 11 stone 7lbs to 7 stone 7lbs. But at last a group of 50 went working on a farm near Parma and we managed to put on a bit of weight, with extra rations and what we could steal and to be free of horrible lice and fleas was wonderful as it was to have a bit more flesh on.

On the 8th September, 1943 Italy ceased fighting and we took off into the countryside. Eventually myself and Les Stewart 7 RTR from Manchester reached the little village of Gaina, near Brescia, after some scary moments by train and bus through what was enemy territory as Germany was now occupiers of Italy. But it was very peaceful in the village and I soon settled in, with the Manessi family treating me like a son.

We stayed in the area for nearly seven months. But once the village was surrounded early morning and five of the seven in the village were captured. Myself and Fred Oliver had a miracle escape in a trail of bullets, even split apart by machine gun fire. We each thought the other had been hit and we dived for cover but we were both unhurt, but as we had gone different ways it was five days before we met up again.

The risk to the village was too great a risk as they had threatened to destroy it if they could prove that we had been sheltered there. But we always said if we did get caught again we had to stick to the story that we were just passing through and so it was spared. It is now almost my second home and over the years a bond has formed that ties me to this wonderful place. *(Bob escaped from Italy into Switzerland and on returning home his story made national news. He received letters from many women whose boyfriends and husbands had been on the ship in the hope he could give them any information. One letter was from the war widow of a fellow DLI soldier, Roger Peel, who was killed in the explosion. He agreed to meet her as they lived in the same region. A romance developed and he was married to Edna for nearly 60 years.)*

I left the UK in 1958 and returned six times. My Last visit, September 2007. Very impressed with the North East vision and way it presents itself - passion and vibrancy. Sad to see the shipyards have gone as they were the lifeblood of the region - Dad and brother worked there.

Seems to be more money around and people have done well for themselves.

Whitley Bay which was where we lived and used to be a real holiday makers mecca seemed run down in the seafront/town part.
Life in NZ - less crowded, more opportunities to branch out on own. Had own painting and decorating business. Joined by Michael, son.
Now Michael has been joined by his son so Rogers and Son painters continues over 3 generations.

Bob Rogers

Hi Nick,

Responding to your letter in to-day's Taranaki Daily News.
Joined up at 18 and served throughout WW2 in Royal Corps of Signals. Four years in the ranks then commissioned at 22 in 1943. First posting to 79th Armoured Div (The Funnies) until after D Day then posted to 7th Armd Div Sigs (Desert Rats). 131 Lorried Infantry Brigade as a Brigade Signals Officer. Campaigned in NW Europe, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Hamburg was the last city we captured a few days before VE Day, liberating POW camps and concentration camps on the way. The Division was chosen to represent Britain in the four-power occupation of Berlin where we arrived in July, 1945. Took part in the Victory Parade there, where Winston Churchill (as he then was) took the salute. We marched past to the strains of Colonel Bogey !

Kind regards,
Joe Rodrigues

Hi Nick,

I was born 1920 in Dartford, Kent. I went to sea in the Merchant Service in 1937 and stayed there until 1946. First visited N.Z. In 1937 and came to live in N.Z in 1946 and have been here since that time.

Being born in 1920 I was just old enough to grow up in the " Great Depression". Times were hard, unemployment was rife, and my father was out of work from 1928 until 1932. Leaving school in 1934 I was fortunate to get a job in a Bakehouse, where I stayed for 2 years. Somehow or the other I got a job as a Steward on the Cadet Training Ship, H.M.S,"Worcester" which was moored at Greenhithe on the Thames. During my 18 months on board I was selected to accompany 12 cadets for 10 days on H.M.S."Cardiff" to attend the Coronation Revue at Spithead. Quite a memorable experience.

It certainly gave me great pleasure to attend the Coronation Revue at Spithead oh the 20th May 1937. I doubt whether there has ever been such an event in the past and it is absolutely certain there will never be one again.

I attended on H.M.S "Cardiff and we were moored between H.M.S "Curacao" and H.M.S "Carlisle" and the Royal Yacht passed us in her procession through the moored fleet. There was merchant vessels from many countries, as well as Men of war, a most impressive sight. We were quite close to the "Graf Spee" and she stood out for her size and style. Oddly enough the next time I saw her was scuttled to her fighting top outside Montevideo Harbour.

Basically jobs were hard to get and I had the opportunity of "going to sea" on the Shaw Savill liner R.M.S." Akaroa". This happened at the end of 1937. Still on the "Akaroa" we left Woolwich docks on the afternoon of September 1st 1939 and whilst proceeding by Dover we were stopped by a destroyer. They wanted the ship's name and number, the captain's name and number and quite a lot of other information. They then instructed us to "Black out" as there was a submarine in the vicinity and "It ain't one of ours". We proceeded to Southampton overnight to embark passengers and departed from there at midday on the 2nd of September, en route to Curacao.

On arrival in Panama we received instructions to proceed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to join a convoy. After a week, there was enough ships to get going, which we did and proceeded, uneventfully, to arrive at the K.G.V Docks on the 27th of December.

Time at home was short as I joined the 'Dominion Monarch' on the 4th January and sailed to N.Z via Cape Town and Australia. The trip both ways was relatively good and the only event was a collision with a small cargo boat, in the English Channel, at about 4.00a.m.

After refitting in Liverpool for trooping we did several trips carrying troops from the U.K and also N.Z. on one of these trips and whilst in convoy we had a collision, which swiped part of the bridge, disrupted the electrical system etc. We were in Freetown the next day and the only thing they could do for us, was to pour tons and tons of cement into the affected parts. This at least stopped the water coming in.

The next stop was Durban where we discharged troops and then spent the next 5 weeks in dry dock to get the cement out. I think it was on this trip we arrived off Sydney at about 9.30pm. We were cruising towards Sydney very slowly and suddenly we took off at top speed. We learnt later that a Midget Japanese submarine had followed a naval convoy into Sydney Harbour and had fired a torpedo at a naval ship, which ricocheted off a wharf and sunk a ferryboat.

About a week later we were anchored, at evening time, inside the boom waiting for the boom to open up the following morning. That night an unknown vessel fired four shells into various Sydney suburbs. In November 1941 we left England with a full load of troops, called into Cape Town and left with another troop carrier and an escort. In those days wireless was forbidden on board and to relieve the monotony both troop carriers 'closed up' to the cruiser, which had the Marine band playing on the after deck, every afternoon from 2pm to 4pm.

Our destination was Singapore, where we arrived on the 1st December 1941. After discharging troops and equipment we moved on 4th December to the naval dry dock at Seletar, Singapore. The Japanese started bombing Hawaii on the 6th December. Moored at the far end of the dockyard was HMS Prince of Wales. HMS Repulse was out in the stream. We were in Seletar when the survivors of the two ships arrived back. A

sad time. *(On the 10th December both ships were out at sea and were attacked by Japanese torpedo planes at 11 am. there was 327 fatalities on HMS Prince of Wales, and the order to abandon ship was given at 13.15 pm and the ship sunk five minutes later. In 2002 the ship's bell was recovered from the sea bed and can be viewed at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool. HMS Repulse's anti aircraft gunners managed to shoot down two planes and damage eight more, but were overwhelmed by the number of torpedoes dropped, four or five hit in quick succession. At 12.23 pm the ship listed heavily to port and capsized. 508 members of the crew were killed.)* We were in the dry dock for quite a while and I kept a meticulous diary of all that was happening. Unfortunately, this diary was confiscated on arrival back in the UK.

In late 1942 I left the Dominion Monarch and remained ashore for a while. In 1943, I joined the R.M.S Akaroa, and this was an entirely different style of shipping. It was on the first trip on her to Wellington that I met my wife and during our initial chats discovered that she had relations living very near to where I lived in England. One thing led to another and we became very friendly. Late in 1944 I went on the R.M.S Rangitata. Again, another ball game, and with the war closing, trips were very uncertain. we did a quick trip to Malta and Egypt, and then the next one to New Zealand. It was on that trip that I decided to settle in NZ.

I was fortunate in obtaining a one way passage and arrived on the 27th May 1946. Settling ashore had been a pipe dream for some time, especially after meeting my wife to be. However, it was a little difficult after ten years at sea, and shaking this and six years of war off was quite an experience.

Living is entirely different. In the UK houses are so close together and have little space overall, whereas in New Zealand, at that time, had a reasonable piece of land. My wife had organised a section (a piece of land for building a house) which was about half an acre on a hillside. i had to fence this and excavate for the house. Quite an experience and totally foreign to a seafarers way of life and thinking. Obtaining a job was relatively easy, as New Zealand was very short of labour, and I was lucky to get suitable work. After several years of settling into the New Zealand way of life I had the opportunity to starting a business, a ship chandlery that fitted into my way of thinking. This was perfect at the time as there was a lot of ships trading around NZ and I had no trouble remaining solvent. Whereas now it is a different picture with containerisation.

So here we are 68 years later, well and truly settled in with a family and grand children.

Regards

Reg Pharaoh.

(P.S. I have strong associations with the Newcastle area, as my Father was born there and I still have a 2nd cousin living in Whitley Bay)

My dear Nick,

My son, who lives in Dunedin saw your enquiry & forwarded it to me.

I have a cousin in Darlington who was in the W.A.A.F. Not sure whether both she & her sister now deceased were in that bunker moving squadrons around during battle of Britain but she certainly was at the last concert given by Glen Miller before his mysterious disappearance.

Are you conversant with the books written by Ralph Barker, the official author for the war office, chronicling the exploits of various branches of the services. My brother, a beaufort pilot stationed on Malta during the seige is featured, with a photo in "The Shipbusters" by him. Unfortunately my autographed copy was stolen but I think my sister still has her copy. My son in Dunedin has all the letters to me, from him, which managed to survive the sinking ships of that time.

His rear gunner was a lad from Consett who swore the Blaydon races saved his life.

I myself worked in A.& E at Southmead Hospital, just down the road from Filton aerodrome where the Beauforts were manufactured. My brother collected his plane there as it rolled off the assembly line. No test pilots in those days.

Even nearer to home in Newcastle you have the granddaughter of two very prominent members of the Hull A.R.P. At the time of the air-raids that wiped out most of the central city, the King & Queen visited & there is a copy (Hull Daily mail, I think) of a newspaper photo of my Aunt curtsying while shaking hands with the queen.

Margaret.L.Maton

Dear Nick,

Many thanks for your e-mail. I will do my best to answer your 7 questions.

1. What are your memories of wartime Britain?

Food shortages, black-out, trying to maintain some form of sanity in the face of all the carnage going on around me.

2. You worked in a hospital, what are your memories of being a nurse during this period?

A series on TV (called casualty. I think) was made at the A&E in Bristol Royal Infirmary (I was in the other big hospital) but it was exactly the same. For the casualties we dealt with, look at the victims of the suicide bombs in Iraq, Israel etc.

3. Can you tell me a bit more about your brothers time in the RAF and about Malta?

Undisclosed by the authorities, not only did Malta suffer starvation (they were down to catching the rats & eating them), but a devastating epidemic of poliomyelitis, which, of course is no respecter of persons & affected the military as well as the civilians. My brother was one of the victims. He only lived because at the start of the war Lord Nuffield had shipped to Malta 6 iron lungs. My brother survived in one of these until eventually the shipping lanes were cleared enough for him to be sent to Cairo in it.

4. When and why did you decide to emigrate to NZ?

In 1969 my husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer. At least we had the time to discuss the future of our two sons aged 9 & 12 at that time. We considered the U.K was paying the price of Victorian empire building with the British culture being eroded by the flood of immigrants entitled to free access from that empire. We were also

concerned with the burgeoning drug crisis. To which there seemed to be no answer. A few years previously I had the opportunity to take an intensive course for a diploma in "the handling & use of radioactive materials" (I have an honours degree in physics from London University) & as a result I could predict a Chernobyl! A view shared by Neville Chute in "On the Beach" required reading, with the injunction. "Remember it is fiction".

So, Australia or N.Z? My Husband had, after the war, served in the merchant navy with regular visits to both countries & chose N.Z. as Australia is a "man's country". Plenty of money there but lifestyle not a patch on that in N.Z. It takes a lot of courage to emigrate when you have no relatives in the reception area & are on your own but I have never regretted carrying out my husband's wishes.

5. What were your impressions when you got there?

I marvel even today at the wonderful reception we had on arrival in N.Z. We went to the South Island, which is an entirely different culture to the North Island.

6. What do you think of NZ today?

Today this difference is booming, even more marked with Auckland going exactly the same way as the U.K when we left. There is a steady move to the South from Auckland of former residents. A friend, who recently visited her son there remarked, while waiting to cross at the traffic lights they looked round & could only see oriental faces. My prediction; the Chinese will take over this planet with competition from the black races!

7. Have you returned to the UK recently and if so what was your impression on your last trip?

I returned once, in 1988 (my only sister is still in Surrey) ,we have written to each other every week since I left, so with those letters & our excellent T.V international news coverage I have kept up with progress (or lack of it) in the U.K.

Finally I will give you what seems to be relevant to what you are interested in doing.

When I saw a prince of the realm using a Nazi uniform as fancy dress, I at last, understood why both my brother & husband had to die so young(& all those other young men women & children). I could never have coped with their distress, on witnessing the present young generation so denigrating all the suffering & sacrifices that we endured to stop Hitler from enslaving the civilised world. Observing Mugabe & his brutality at the moment reminds me (on a much smaller scale) of Hitler & the Gestapo. I felt sorry for the Queen, the day she reached the eligible age she volunteered & was in the A.T.S. so there was no doubt the then royal family saw the situation very clearly Finally imagine the thoughts of the very few Jews who survived the holocaust, being told it did not happen & they were carrying permanent evidence of it on their own bodies!

Did you realise they were sent to the gas chambers by the calling out the number tattooed on their forearms? Most (probably all) of these sentiments are expressed by the members of my generation here whom I come into contact with.

Jolly good luck. Let me know how you get on as I feel most of the present generation would rather sweep it under the carpet, & tell us to stop whinging & forget

about it, Probably they are right too.

All the best from
Margaret

Dear Sir

I am a born Kiwi, aged 82 years, but was in the Navy during the latter part of the Pacific War, against Japan. I was 19 years old when I visited Nagasaki after the atomic bomb was exploded which ended the war. The British Fleet, plus three American fleets were off the Japanese coast for three months, sending up to 600 planes a day to bomb Japanese cities, prior to the atomic bomb drop. I lived in Japan for 12 months after the war and my observation of the damage done by these raids, had Japan almost destroyed. I believe the second bomb was dropped more or less as an experiment by the Americans.

NAGASAKI

As a crew member of HMS Achilles we visited Nagasaki arriving on the 22nd November 1945. The impact of that visit has been with me ever since. The story begins as we are entering Nagasaki, very slowly steaming up the river with nothing in sight except the low lying hills and willow trees similar to our own river view, except that there was a distinct high water line around 5-20ft and debris up to the water line as if there had been a flood. My senior commander was Commander Holmes. We were on the ships bridge with about 20 other officers and crew and much comment surrounded this subject. I was later to find out the cause of this flooding.

We rounded a corner in the river and there was Nagasaki completely devastated, flattened and charred. No wharf or jetty, we went ashore in small boats and just scrambled up the river bank over charred rocks etc. My friend and I were just beginning to walk along a newly cleared road when an American Jeep with two soldiers in it passed by. They were jeering at us being 'Limeys' (British soldiers) when they noticed our shoulder flashes with N.Z on them. They stopped and offered us a ride, as they had been to N.Z. One having married a N.Z girl.

We were getting low on petrol, so we called into a filling station. Forty four gallon drums with a pump attached. While the negro attachment was pumping petrol, I asked a lieutenant if he knew anything about radiation. He replied that he didn't and no one had briefed them on it; so they had sent them in and nothing happened to them so they came in after ten days. (That statement rocked me a bit, because my friend was a Maori boy)

From there we proceeded along cleared roads etc until we came to an air raid shelter, where there was a bulldozer at work filling in drains. The air raid shelter entrance was similar to an underground railway station, except to enter one had to first jump into a feed in drain which connected to the main entrance drain. The feed in

drains were staggered in order that if one got blocked, people could enter from another. These drains were full of people when the bomb exploded, 500 ft above the ground. Imagine looking up at a lone plane and thinking it won't be much of an air raid this time, when suddenly life was extinguished for thousands of people.

The soldiers were having fun prizing bodies from the banks, where the blast had pushed them so forcefully they were still embedded in the sides of the drains. When they were levered out, one side was black and burnt, the other was white. The imprint was still left, but what struck me was the silk komonos were still left in the ground and not burnt. Little ones, larger ones but no male imprints, indicating most would be women and children. I said to the Americans "I've seen enough, lets go".

They took us out to their camp which was about 8 miles out. We were given a nice steak and a bottle of beer. having been at sea for about ninety days, living on dehydrated potatoes and boiled eggs (some with chickens in), a steak was a real luxury. I noticed there were no black soldiers there and asked why. I was informed they were still camped back at Nagasaki, and this unit was in the safe area.

The people who died later were mostly living in the area between the outer perimeter of the bomb blast and the American camp. The Americans told us that those who were looking towards the bomb were instantly made blind from the flash and deaf from the force of the blast. They died because they could not feed themselves, having become instantly blind and deaf and those closer to the bomb were burnt as well. This tragedy applied to all other living things.

From my observations of Nagasaki I concluded that events happened very swiftly, but in a sequence of stages. First was the blast indicated by the silk in the drain bank. Second was the heat indicated by the charred bodies. Third was the rain which brought on the flood, which drowned anyone who happened to be at the deepest end of the air raid shelters and who may have survived. The heat was so intense that we saw some big berth guns, possibly 16 inch shells and the twenty five foot barrels had bent, with the ends resting on the ground. The blast was so intense that the high buildings all collapsed into the river and blocked it, causing the valley to build up with water, like a huge dam, until it all gave way and washed out to sea, hence the debris on the Willow trees as we came into the harbour. This would explain why the radiation was not as bad as Hiroshima. (*Estimates for deaths at Hiroshima range from 90,000 to 166,000 and deaths at Nagasaki, 60,000 to 80,000*)

The American hospitality was so good we were late returning to our ship. We could see the liberty boat was just about to leave without us, so the Jeep driver drove over a very twisted railway bridge and we scrambled down the bank and into the boat. On realising that we were half drunk, the duty officer put us on a charge and Commander Holmes gave us five days on light rations in the brigg (jail). We sailed next morning to be met by huge seas. The brigg being right up in the bow of the ship we were rising and falling about 20ft at a time. I managed to hold on to my steak and beer, as light rations were dog biscuits and water.

from what I have written you would not be surprised if I told you I support any protesters who wish to ban the bomb and all the testing and anything that is nuclear war; one nation against another.

Now about N.Z since the war. I have travelled to many countries in my life and am always pleased to be home in N.Z. In my view N.Z society is slowly drifting downward. Murder nearly every day, 10 in Auckland in one month alone. With the advent of the 'pill', partners living together instead of marriage. Decline in religious beliefs etc. Drugs and gangs, rapes by police, large scale fraud etc, but we still see the sun and moon the same as you, but you never see the Southern Cross stars.

Kindest Regards
E G Buchanan

Dear Nick

I was born in 1923 at a private house in Invercargill NZ. I was one of 14 children. Of the 14 children, 11 made it to adults. Two boys and one girl passed away, all three in 1927. We were a happy family, my father was a carpenter and joiner by trade and worked for a builder of cottages and was with the same boss for many years.

My father had an acre of ground and a big percentage of that ground was growing vegetables for his family. Very little meat was bought from the butchers van, an old Model T Ford. All of us boys as we grew up went rabbiting and used any undamaged rabbit carcasses for home consumption, but the main reason we caught and killed rabbits was for the valuable skins we got from them.

When I was old enough, I guess about 10 years old, I worked on a milk run before school, then went to school about 9am daily. Milk in those days was fetched from a cow farm. In my case my boss had a Harley Davidson motorcycle complete with a tray on the left side, with a third wheel and all the cans of milk were carried there. We journeyed around Invercargill collected the milk and went around our customers each day. Secondary school was not an option for a lot of families including my Dad & Mum's. There was a system where you could go to school after work for three hours which they called night school, and you could study for whatever trade you were working at during the day.

When World War II started I was 16 years old, so could not join the army. I took a position at a cow farm at Lake Hayes near Queenstown for a season, but went back to Invercargill, where I hunted for a farm job. I moved to a sheep farm about 20 miles from Invercargill. I stayed in that job ploughing with six horses and discing and working up the ground for swede turnips or winter crops for the sheep. Meadow hay was also cut and stacked for winter feed.

On 9th January 1941 I turned 18 years old and that year of the war conscription was in force. So my name was in a NZ wide ballot for war service. Happily I was chosen and in July '41 I was instructed by H.M Government of NZ to present myself for a medical inspection to see if I was in a fit state to join the services for the defence of NZ and wherever else I was sent by the NZ Government. I duly passed the inspection that day and was asked by an examiner if I could ride a horse, on answering yes, I was told I

would be a member of the 5th Mounted Rifles Otago Hussars or OMR for short. Luckily for me and any horses I had to ride, the horses were dropped and we became the 5th LAFV, 5th Light Armoured Fitting Vehicles.

After spending two years around camps in NZ, my unit was sent back to Burnham in June 1943 and all personnel 21 years and over were drafted into the 10th reinforcements and would be going to the Middle East (Egypt) as armoured reinforcements. Our NZ division was in Maadi near Cairo and the whole of the division was being reinforced before heading to Italy. Although I was not then 21 years old, I was expected to get consent from my father to say I could go. The troopship I boarded in Wellington on 20th July 1943 was the New Amsterdam. There was 7,900 personnel on the boat. We took off from Wellington as soon as the boat was loaded and sailed down the south coast, passed Bluff and headed for Tasmania. We went right up to Hobart and took on some foreign internees. One of these people died on the voyage and was buried at sea, our ship did not stop, nor did we have an escort warship.

We arrived in Maadi on 18th August 1943. We went to our various tents, we were all together as part of the Armoured Corp reinforcements. We were only there two or three days and people were being called out to join the various tank parties. NZ now had its own tank crews. 18/19/20 infantry battalions had been converted to tank regts, after the desert campaign had finished. I was claimed by the NZ Divisional Cavalry as a motor transport fitter. On the first day we arrived in Egypt I had found my older brother who had been all through the desert. I also found another brother who had arrived in the troopship before me. I was not long in Maadi before I got the Dysentery bug and was sent to a NZ hospital out at Mena where the Pyramid sits. When I got out of hospital the troops had all left Maadi, so I stayed in Egypt for a while. I did more courses on Sherman tanks, gunnery and engines while waiting to go to Italy. Finally I got on a boat and landed at Taranto.

Myself and a few others were taken further up towards Bari, where our NZ advance base was. While at advance base, the personnel asked for volunteers to help set up out 3rd NZ hospital in Bari. A friend and I went. I think we stayed in the hospital. We were making hospital beds (200) and we were in a hurry because our division was at the Sangro river and fighting the Germans again. We had only just finished in helping in the hospital when casualties were coming to Bari by rail. We stayed at the hospital and were stretcher bearers for a while, then went back to advance base.

The advance at the Sangro river wasn't going very well, and snow wasn't helping much. The powers that be had shifted the NZ Division over to the 5th Army front and eventually we came to Cassino and trouble. I was still with the Divisional Cavalry and we were given a section of the front to hold, only about a dozen of us. I was in charge of a Browning .300 machine gun, and went out after dark and occupied the dug outs, until daylight, then got into the house had breakfast and went to bed for the day. We probably stayed there about 10 days, we were then relieved by a British unit. I think we were overwhelmed by the numbers they sent to relieve us.

When we went out, we were taken to a mobile bath house dropped our dirty underwear in a bag, and issued with clean underwear after we had our shower. This was the finish of my time with the Divisional Cavalry because my older brother had

claimed me into the 23rd Infantry Battalion. After the Poles took Cassino, we moved up through Atina to Archie where our battalion stopped for quite a while.

I was in charge of an American Jeep at this time and was told to take my brother and two other soldiers back to Cassino to try to locate some of our dead soldiers. My brother had a pretty good idea where they were. One person they found because of his red hair. We marked the bodies for the graves registration. What a horrible job, locating and shifting bodies. After some time at Archie, Rome had been liberated, we packed up and headed for Rome and beyond. We stopped at a place called San Donata and that was the start of our advance on Florence. After quite a few casualties we entered Florence, but we were told the South Africans had that honour. Our campaign for Florence was finished so we were sent over to the Adriatic side of Italy and moved into Rimini town. It had been pretty badly shelled.

My job with the Jeep was to take breakfast and tea up to the troops, find them and return to the cookhouse and help the cooks clean all the gear ready for the morning, then go to bed. We usually tried to get up to the troops before daylight, but we didn't know if they had shifted during the night. I must say that I was never alone driving the rations Jeep, usually a sergeant or an officer was there with me to map read the way, sometimes the troops did not shift. On 28th September 1944 I was again at the front and had fed the boys and was ready to go back to the cookhouse. Suddenly we heard the mortars shooting, so I dived under a lean to on the house. Another guy from our unit beat me and a tank crew followed me. Only one mortar came our way but it hit the top of our shelter, took off my mates leg and about four pieces of shrapnel went into my two legs, but not life threatening. An ARP first aider came into the shelter but said he could not help the soldier. I guess he was dead as soon as he was hit. I was taken to hospital by an American field ambulance. I spent a month in hospital and did not get back to my unit until 1st January 1945.

Our next campaign started on 9th April 1945 and the Senio was to be attacked and hopefully the Germans might give up. The barrage started at 2pm with Bomber Fortresses of the USAF. Lighter bombers over the river and back area. The heavies bombed the supply dump and any other likely targets. These cab rank fighter bombers flew around an area until they were told of a map reference or notified by the infantry, then down they came. They were an Australian squadron and really took their work seriously. We started on the 9th April and our tanks drove into Trieste on 2nd May. There were a lot of waterways and very high stop banks that had to be flattened before a Bailey Bridge could be erected to allow our tanks to cross the obstacle and support our troops. When we eventually arrived in Trieste, about half of Marshall Tito's troops from Yugoslavia were camped in the town and were holding the place against all comers. There was also around 200 German troops holed up in the town hall, but they weren't keen on surrendering to Tito's mob.

When our tanks arrived in the city they asked the Germans to surrender, when they did not do so immediately the tank commander ordered a shell to be fired through the window, that prompted the Germans to come out. They were then rounded up and hurried out of Trieste or the Tito mob might have attacked them. The Germans had always been very severe with the Tito partisans and they were keen to retaliate.

Our unit was disbanded and we were the only troops of the 2nd NZEF Division in Italy. When we left Italy we left from Taranto in a rather smaller ship. The M.V Tamaroa one of the Shaw, Savill and Albion Line, which was called 'Slow, Starvation and Agony'. It was a happy ship about 400 souls, some Italian brides and small children. Australian airmen besides the NZ troops. This would be the last ship home.

We were finally taken by steam train to Dunedin and I finished up boarding with a lady who I treated as a mother and her son, who was in the same battalion and wounded badly in Italy and suffered for the rest of his days. I married in 1947 and we had five children, four still alive. My wife of 59 years passed away in 2007.

Regards
Bob Gough

Dear Mr Pringle

In response to your letter published in our local paper, The Wairoa Star I am intrigued to reply.

I am 88 years old - I joined the WRNS in 1939 in Glasgow, Scotland and was very soon drafted to Oban, the newly established base for R.N Western Approaches; the Firth of Lorne being the assembly area for convoys heading across the world. It was of course a highly secret area. The Royal Navy took over the Station Hotel as its headquarters. I was one of the first Wrens to be there, with one other Wren for company. Our job was to type out and prepare sailing orders and positions designated for the Merchant Navy fleets assembled in preparation for their departure in convoy escorted by the Royal Navy.

I was 19 years of age; our job was top secret to which we were sworn. Gradually the base filled up to considerable capacity. The Australian Air Force arrived with its Sunderlands and other flying boats. It was a very vital and vulnerable port and we all played our part.

In 1942 I was recommended for commission spending training at Greenwich and qualifying as 3rd officer W.R.N.S. From there I was appointed to Dartmouth Naval Base as secretary N.C.S to the captain whose name I do not remember. Inevitably I had met many splendid naval personnel - one in particular a young lieutenant in the Royal Navy, F.N.F Johnston (Nigel) proposed and married me in 1943. It so transpired that he was a young New Zealander who had joined 'special entry' navy on leaving school in N.Z. He was serving in the Mediterranean when war broke out. It was 10 years before he revisited his homeland - with a wife (me) and two children in 1946. Because of family responsibilities here in New Zealand, Nigel retired from the Royal Navy and joined the newly founded Royal New Zealand Navy.

Continuing his career in the RNZN meant that I became a New Zealand citizen - 'a UK expat' which I have remained ever since. In 1962 Nigel retired as captain RNZN from which time we spent some years in the UK living in the Scottish Highlands from where my maternal family originated, in the Isle of Skye. There we ran a Highland hotel

which had been the large home of one of my uncles, my mothers brother. It was a very challenging and interesting experience which demanded all our resources and enabled us to finish the education of our four children. Finally we returned to New Zealand. My husband died in 2001 and I live on the family property in Hawkes Bay. We had the best of both worlds!

Morag Johnston

Dear Sir

I read your request in one of our local rags requiring incidents in one's war service. I went in the RNZAF in August 1941 at the ripe old age of eighteen years and two months and after obtaining my wings in Canada I commenced training on Spitfires in July at Llandow (south Wales) in July 1942 and in October 1942 I started flying with 165 Squadron at Gravesend in Kent and then later from Tangmere. When the squadron was posted to Peterhead things became a bit dull and when a posting came up for Malta I asked our Belgian C.O if I could have it. As he always referred to we Kiwis as 'bloody colonials' I think he was glad to see me go, so in August 1943 I started flying with 185 Squadron and there I stayed. I was usually known as 'Ossie' on the squadron.

I had been acting flight commander on 185 Fighter Squadron operating from Fano, on the east coast of Italy. On the night of 24th August 1944 the phone went and the C.O handed the phone over to me and said take this Ossie. It was Operations and they requested me to pick my five best pilots and report to Sienna on the other side of Italy early next morning. I asked what the job was and was told I would receive orders over there.

We were up and away early and on arrival at Sienna awaited instructions. A jeep drove up and the occupant introduced himself and pointed out a Dakota transport that was sitting on the tarmac and said that Prime Minister Churchill's aircraft and you will be escorting it to Loreto and then on to Jesi. It took a little while to sink in, but I think I turned to my guys and said, "Well you have heard what the job is, if anything happens to the boss they will probably shoot us the next day." The flight was quite uneventful and we landed at Loreto and after a wait of two or three hours we were off again to land at Jesi. Of course we had to just wait around while Mr Churchill conferred with the military. All this time and we had not had a meal or a cup of tea since early in the morning and some of my guys started to get a bit grumpy.

Now the airfields in Italy were quite dusty and our ground crew kept our aircraft spotless and shiny, so I suggested that we give them a bit of a clean up starting on my own first. Consequently several hours later when Mr Churchill reappeared instead of six grubby looking aircraft, our spitfires were gleaming in the sun. I noticed Mr Churchill look over and he spoke to the brigadier who came over and told me that the boss wanted to meet his escort. When I shook hands with him and introduced myself, I am only 5ft 4in and I was surprised to see that he was not much taller. he congratulated me again on the appearance of my flight and I said "there is a bit of a

story to it Sir," He took his cigar out of his mouth and I guess he knew I had stirred the guys up to get the aircraft cleaned and with his face about eighteen inches from mine and twinkles in his eyes which I will never forget he said "Yes, I can well imagine." Another outfit took over from there and we returned to Fano, another job done and none of us quite realising what an honour it had been to part of that episode of the great man's life.

I continued on operations until the end of the year and was finally caught up by the powers that be. I had been on continuous operations since August 1942 and managed to avoid being sent on rest. The choice was mine of course and when I got back to the UK early in January 1945 I tried to get on squadron in Europe, but there were so many guys who hadn't had a chance to get on ops, that I had no show. I did get back on to Spitfires on a unit known as the Coastal Command Fighter Circus and stayed with them until the N.Z authorities finally caught up with me in October 1945 and I was shipped back to New Zealand with a lifetime of memories and experiences.

I was discharged from the RNZAF just about as quickly as the Govt could get us out and my rating was A1. However, about two months later I went to the same examiner to get my clearance for civilian flying and the guy scrubbed me, told me I had a leaky heart valve. I didn't believe him as I was as fit as a fiddle and indeed played rugby for two seasons before starting a construction company which involved a lot of hard work. In 1979 I had some teeth filled and the specialists at Greenlane Hospital thought the dentists instruments must have been a bit grubby because a surgical bacteria had settled on my Aorta valve. The result was I was the recipient of a human transplant and was sent home to get fit.

I was walking around the little bay close to the home I had built when a car pulled up alongside me and Captain McKellar from the Northland harbour Board introduced himself and asked me if I wanted a job, I told him no as I was trying to get fit. He was a lovely guy and talked me into becoming harbourmaster covering the harbour itself, all of Doubtless Bay and altogether about 40 miles of open coast. Mangonui has always been the busiest fishing port in the north and so I had to get fit fast. I already had the skippers tickets required and so I have been on the job for 28 years and I turned 85 last week.

Jimmy Osborne

SOME LOG BOOK ENTRIES

YEAR 1944

August 17 SPITFIRE VC(W) - DIVE BOMBING BRIDGE: RIMINI

Missed bridge but hit nearby road. Lots of flak.

August 24 SPITFIRE VC(D) - ARMED RECCE

Straffed one truck. No flak.

August 25 SPITFIRE VIII(P) - ESCORT TO WINSTON CHURCHILL

Sienna to Loreto: Made a speech to Brown Jobs. Loreto to Jesi: The Boss wanted to meet

his escort. Not very tall. Shook hands with me.
Sept 10 SPITFIRE VIII(L) - ROVER DAVID
Bombed gun position: Moderate flak.
Sept 12 SPITFIRE VIII(C) - ARMED RECCE
Bombed railway. Sgt Jeans hit with flak.
SPITFIRE VIII(A) - ARMED RECCE
Bombed railway. Hit a small truck by level crossing.
Sept 13 SPITFIRE VIII(A) - ARMED RECCE; BOMBED RAILWAY
Covered area west of Bologna; north of Modena.
Sept 14 SPITFIRE VB(Y) - BOMBED BRIDGE: ARMED RECCE
Straffed gun posts and armoured car.
Sept 15 SPITFIRE VIII(P) - DIVE BOMBING BRIDGE: RAVENNA AREA
Flak from Ravenna
Sept 16 SPITFIRE VIII(P) - ARMED RECCE: DIVE BOMBED BRIDGE
4 direct hits.
Sept 18 SPITFIRE IXB(F) - DIVE BOMBING AND STRAFFING GUN POSITIONS
All bombs in target area. Moderate light flak.
Sept 19 SPITFIRE IXB(L) - DIVE BOMBING GUN POSITION
Excellent results.
Sept 20 SPITFIRE IXB(F) - BOMBING AND STRAFING STRONG POINT.
Cumulo (Storm clouds) Bofors (Anti aircraft guns). Target destroyed.

FLYING HOURS GRAND TOTAL TO DATE - 675 hrs 55mins

Dear Nick

I read your letter in the Nelson Mail and wondered whether you wanted a reply from an ex Wren. I joined the WRNS in 1942 and after two weeks at Mill Hill became a bomb range marker. I served on RNAS stations in Cornwall, Scotland and the Isle of Man - as well as time spent at the R.A.E Farnborough and time in Norfolk marking low level rocket firing by Typhoons. My photograph was on the front page of the Daily Sketch after a U.S Flying Fortress ran out of fuel and landed on our all women grass airfield attached to RNAS St Merryn. The write up of the incident was on display at the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovil when I visited in 1990.

You ask what my memories of WWII are. They were times of excitement and sadness and boredom! I made some good friends, female and male - two of whom, one in Bomber Command and one a F.A.A pilot were killed and another F.A.A pilot instructor whom I married in May 1945. He was a New Zealander who came from Nelson. He was 10th in the family of 13. He came home on an aircraft carrier and I came to NZ on R.M.S Raugitata, built for 250 passengers with 1100 on board, in January 1946.

New Zealand is a beautiful country but I do wish it was not at the bottom of the world! I have been back since by sea with my daughters in 1955 and seven times by air. I love England particularly the countryside and still regard myself as a Pom. But I had a

wonderful husband and mother in law and am lucky to have numerous nephews, nieces and their families. I have five children, 14 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.

Yours sincerely
Rosemary Mabin

Dear Mr Pringle

Or may I call you Nick in true Kiwi fashion? Your letter appeared in the paper some weeks ago and set me off remembering things of all those years ago.

My memories of military service goes back to March 1939. In this month I was required to register for conscription of 20 year olds for six months militia service. I was called up to do this in July and like all others looked upon it as a bit of an adventure. Rumours of war abounded at this time and sure enough war was declared on 3rd September after Hitler had invaded Poland. We then knew we were 'in for the duration' with no realisation of how long that would be or what experiences would be brought upon us.

My training continued until I was proficient at 'square bashing' and could handle a rifle and fire it. As the regiment was an artillery one I was passed onto gun training and drills on a 3.7 mobile ack ack gun and duties on a Sperry Predictor. This all culminated in a live practice shoot on a Cornwall coast. That over, it was back to training camp to perform camp fatigues while awaiting a posting.

Mine came in early 1940 when I was sent to a Territorial Regiment that was being readied for embarkation to France to join the BEF. This was another adventure for me, and perhaps a 'joke' for the army as I, after training as a heavy A.A gunner found myself a member of a light A.A regiment. This was clear when we were delivered our 8 Bofor guns some days after disembarking. This led to another stint of training and gun drills, but no actual firing in this so called 'Phoney War' stage. When the shooting did start and when German planes appeared in our skies we put our best efforts into shooting them down, with varying degrees of success.

The fortunes of war went against the B.E.F soon after the battle began and while the bulk of the forces were being evacuated from Dunkirk my own luck ran out and I was made a prisoner of war in a rear guard action.

This started a rather grim period for me and is really best left forgotten. At first food and good news was very scarce - facts which did nothing to raise my morale at that time. With others I was marched to Germany and registered at Stalag IXC, but it was quite a few months before mail and Red Cross food parcels reached us, both of which brightened our spirits considerably.

For most of my five years of captivity I was employed on labouring work that the Germans wanted me to do. For some reason I seemed to get moved about quite a lot to different camps, which while it made for variety, it did make it difficult, in fact impossible to make and keep contact with friends.

Prisoners were always looking for news and after learning of the Russian advances from the east, and the Allies success in Africa and then Italy we really did begin to take heart. And after hearing of the D-Day landings we just knew that it had to be the beginning of the end. When peace did come I was able to get myself back to England, first on an American flight to Paris, and then on a flight in a RAF Dakota direct to a landing field in Kent.

The liberty was very nice to have but somehow my homecoming was not what I had so often dreamed it would. I recall that it seemed flat and unexciting, and though I was cared for by very kind people, there was no spark about it all. My parents had died in 1935 and when I reached my home town I learned that my older brother was away sailing his aircraft carrier to Australia and that most of my pre war pals were still at their war stations in various parts of the world. I knew very few people in the neighbourhood and looking back on those days I suppose I was overcome by a certain loneliness after the confines of POW camps. I was given 6 weeks leave which I spent searching out some of my parents relatives and all the cousins I could trace - all of which was a help but I was still left with a very unsettled feeling.

I didn't mind a bit when my leave was up and the army informed me where to report back to. Back in the army I half expected to be demobbed, but was quite pleased when the M.O graded me medically A1 - even though it meant that I was fit for further service. Several more different postings followed, and quite frankly I don't think the army knew what to do with a large influx of ex POWs. My penultimate posting was to a ASTU at Leeds University.

Whilst there I was transferred to the Royal Engineers and then posted to the Army Post Office stationed in Nottingham. At last I thought the army had seen in my records that pre war I had worked as a postal sorting clerk and now they were going to use my experience and expertise I had retained and perhaps retrain me in some of it before returning me to Civvy Street. But oh no! After six years of war the army hadn't lost any of its sense of humour and still liked its little jokes. After I arrived at Nottingham the only mail I ever saw was my own personal letters!

1947 saw my number come up again for demob and this time I gave it a lot of consideration. I was then feeling completely settled and I was still enjoying my army work, but I also realised that I had to face Civvy Street one day or another, so I took my suit and walked out. I had a long leave due - both demob and overseas days and took most of it before reporting back to the Post Office for work. I really did try and settle back into it all but after only a few weeks I realised it wasn't working out for me - the camaraderie that I had known in 1939 wasn't there and it had become just a job. Had I just grown old for my years?

I was beginning to wonder what the future held for me and what I would do with it when I saw a notice in the newspaper from the New Zealand Government asking for emigrants to their country. I had liked the Kiwi soldiers I had met in those German prison camps and still had fond memories of them. There was nothing holding me to Britain, I could live in their country, so I applied! After being checked out as a suitable resident of NZ I was accepted and offered a job in a coal mine! Well, it could be no worse than some of the work I had been made to do in Germany, so I accepted it.

When I was given a sailing date in December between Christmas and New Year I was happy as a sand boy.

New Zealand in February 1950 was still enjoying summer weather and I, with 19 others was posted to a west coast mining township in the area which had the reputation of being the friendliest in a very friendly country. There it was easy to make friends with my workmates and by joining in the social life of the town I soon became acquainted with many of the residents. I very quickly found myself quite happy and contented with my new life and could credit a lot of this to the fact I was in a new country and had no previous experiences of it so I could accept everything I found there. I have commented many times since what a fine place Reefton was to start a new life in and I thank my lucky stars that my willingness to work in a coal mine took me there.

And so time passed pleasantly and the idea of having another adventure was a complete success. Quite some time later, when I was looking around for other possible job prospects I met a lassie who had come out from Scotland a year before me. She had been a Land Girl during the war, and perhaps was ready to venture into new experiences too. When we got to know each other a bit we found we both liked New Zealand and considered it a good country to settle in - so we married and did just that! We are still together after 59 years and enjoyed raising our seven children. Now we are delighted that our family has grown to 21 with four generations and always love to have them around us.

We were both very fortunate in not suffering any pangs of homesickness so the subject of a trip home didn't crop up when it was virtually impossible through lack of time and money. But I retired at the age of 67 and the idea of a trip to the UK cropped up. We worked on it and 5 days after I finished work we were in London. After our life in NZ with its total population of 4 million we first noticed the density of people everywhere and we realised the problems of transportation. We learned how useful the motorway system was and how good all the public transport systems were. Though not affected personally we witnessed the bugbear of parking vehicles! As we travelled about we were reminded of just how beautiful the British countryside really is. Kiwis like to boast about the beauties of their country, but no one will convince us that it is any more than the UK.

That first trip led on to another in 90 and 95, which were both thoroughly enjoyed, but there was nothing to cause us to have any serious thoughts about returning there to live. No, we are very well satisfied to live out our days here in NZ where we have quite good public services and family around us to help us out when and if needed.

George Yerbury

To Nick Pringle

I read your letter in the Waikatu Times and was interested. In 1939 when World

War 2 started I was 16, too young to go nursing or to join any of the armed forces, so I joined the Women's Land Army and enjoyed farming until 1946.

The farmers wife I was working for saw an advert in the 'Times' for psychiatric nurses in New Zealand; I applied as did 1,000 other girls and was very surprised when I was accepted. The first group, 26, sailed for N.Z on September 11th 1946 and arrived here on Oct 23rd, having left from Tilbury on the 'Rangitai', 12 of us came to Tokanui Hospital near Te Awamutu, where we had a 2 year contract, a very nice atmosphere at the hospital and we made many friends. After finishing my contract I married a farmer next door to the hospital and have lived at Te Awamutu ever since. The first thing I noticed about NZ was that the green was not as green as England, I still don't think so. New Zealanders were very easy going and a popular saying was 'She's right mate'. It was a very easy country to live in and we were amazed when we had a steak for breakfast as big as a dinner plate, or sometimes 3 chops; after rationing it was heaven. After we gave up farming I went back to work at Tokanui for 8 years, it wasn't quite the same.

I had 4 trips back to England and found it very crowded, but would still like to live in an English village. Of my five children, three of them have been to England and I have two grandchildren living in England now. I myself was born not far from you at Tynemouth and spent summer holidays at Whitley Bay.

All the best
Joan Oates (Culley)

Dear Nick

I saw your request in our local paper so thought I could give you an insight from a Kiwi born and bred boy.

I was born on March 19th 1922, the youngest of a family of eight. Our father born at Bangor on Dee in Wales, our mother born in Waiuku, NZ. Our parents were dairy farmers milking 55 cows on a 55 acre block of land. These blocks were balloted in 1912 and were covered in virgin bush which had to be cleared before farming could begin. After World War One many returned servicemen took up similar blocks and toiled to become dairy farmers also. This took till around 1924-1926 to accomplish, so there were by now many large families; our local school had over 450 pupils. Servicemen returning from WW1 brought with them an influenza epidemic which played havoc and caused many more deaths country wide. A depression in 1929 knocked the stuffing out of employment and many relied on soup kitchen fare to survive.

An earthquake in Hawkes Bay in 1931 flattened Napier and Hastings and did considerable damage elsewhere and many deaths were reported. It was this disaster which pulled the country out of the doldrums as thousands flocked to repair the damage and employment was plentiful once more. By 1933 things were improving and our garden looked rosy.

Many great aviators had proved the aeroplane was reliable. Kids my age became air minded since Lindberg and others made headline news. Kingsford Smith and Jean Batten were closer to home. The British Empire had reached its peak, but by 1939 we were at war once more. At 17 1/2 years I tried to join the Air Force; too young, not enough education. Hundreds like myself rushed to join the Empire Training Scheme set up to supply Britain with aircrew. In 1939 dozens sailed to Britain and joined the RAF. By July 1942 I had made it. I learnt to fly in NZ, gained my wings in 1943. Although Japan was a menace, several of us were sent to Britain to maintain numbers.

We travelled via America, not touched by war, arriving at Brighton a week before Christmas, '43. The coldest and most miserable Xmas of my life. First stop was in Thornaby in Yorkshire (where I met my wife), then to Burtonwood in Lancashire, a huge American base for B17's or Fortresses and from there to Kidlington near Oxford, and advanced training unit. From here another Kiwi and I were posted to No.1 Airgunnery School at Pembrey in South Wales, others from A.T.U were posted to squadrons. At Pembrey I towed drogues for air gunners using live ammunition, not the healthiest of air force pastimes. Then on to Spitfires for fighter tactics using camera guns, there till VE Day. Posted to Barrow in Furness till end of September 1945. Posted to Cranage and eventually back to Brighton. Married 12 Jan 1946 and left for NZ arriving home on my 24th birthday.

Applied to rehabilitation to take over the family farm, graded 'B' and sent to learn to farm with a WW1 veteran who I discovered only wanted cheap labour. Told the rehab what to do with their tuition and their farms and became a schoolteacher for the next 30 years 1950-80.

CHANGES IN NEW ZEALAND

After arriving home in March after WWII I tried several different types of employment while waiting for my wife to arrive in July, from cheese making to driving trucks, none of which appealed to me. For four years this continued then I settled for school teaching and loved it.

I knew everybody in our local town of 1,500 people, joined service clubs and we did heaps of voluntary work and enjoyed life. We had three daughters and took pride in all we did. Woodville was a thriving rural town, a junction; Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa and Manawatu. The school roll had now dropped to 250, so where had they gone? The larger families had gone and were replaced by much smaller ones. For the young ones growing up, employment became less so they had to move to the cities. The small farms were now being bought up by neighbours, where there was five or six farms in my youth there was only one. Cars made it easy for folk to shop in the cities, businesses in Woodville suffered. The only bank in our town closed forcing folk to bank elsewhere. The local post office closed and more upheaval to a small town. Shops closed because of lack of trade. Our supermarket went under because of takeovers. By the time I had retired from teaching our village had been reduced to a ghost town. This happened to the other rural towns throughout the country. Our village now consists mainly of antique/second hand shops, cafes and takeaways, motels and one small grocery shop.

New Zealand was once a land of sixty million sheep, now many of these sheep farmers are changing to dairying, which meant we have sixty million cows and fewer sheep. This creates more problems. The sheep farming land is not suitable for dairying. The result is that to produce more milk the land needs more fertiliser and water. Top dressing planes dump tonnes of fertiliser on the land which then pollutes the rivers, millions of gallons of water are pumped from the rivers to irrigate the land. This lowers the water level and causes serious drop in flow unable to dispense of pollution and the dog continues to chase the tail.

Where in my youth we had 30 farms supporting around 300 people, today there are 4 farms supporting around 30. Our railway system was sold by a useless National government causing thousands more huge trucks and tankers to use the roads, causing congestion. We are still a delightful country with so much to see within a thousand miles. Fortunately we have no nuclear plants, we are producing power with windmills. We are now surrounded by windfarms - no pollution!

CHANGES TO BRITAIN

Between 1975 and 1984 my wife and I visited Britain five times. By now the British Empire has lost its way and it not an empire as we knew it. An example; when we left GB after the war Brixton, London housed around 80,000 Englishmen in 1975 when we first returned Brixton housed 125,000 Trinidadians. Enoch Powell's warnings were given a 'deaf ear'. England then joined the E.E.C and the Empire went under. Edward Heath 'sold you out' so to speak. The NZ - Britain ties gradually diminished. On our last visit in 1983 Trinidadians and others had bred and became British citizens. Many Brits emigrated, many came to new Zealand, thought they were being squeezed out their own country. But some like my father had left because they wanted a different way of life and a chance to obtain a plot of land of their own.

We like you have changed to the decimal system, gone are Pounds, Shillings and Pence, but I note that some stubborn Englishmen still stick to their guns and defy the change, bless 'em. and I note also that tyres for vehicles are still measured in inches - laughable. During the war we used to sing 'There'll always be an England' and were proud of our heritage. It seems the EU is doing its damnest to change that. Don't let them.

We love Great Britain, it's a beautiful country, still the 'Emerald Isles', let it never be lost to foreigners, but of course we have no power in that direction. My English wife and I are now 86 and have been together for 62 years. Our grand children travel between NZ & GB like we visit the village for groceries, that's progress we're told.

Greeting from down under
Rob Dodd

Hi Nick

I was reading our local paper and I came across your letter to the Otago Daily Times enquiring about World War 2 veterans, so I thought you might be interested in my service in WW2. First of all, have lived in New Zealand since 1947 having married and brought up a really good family. My wife and I have had a few trips to the UK as we have a daughter who lives near London.

I served in the Merchant Navy, when war broke out in 1939 I was still at school but I decided to try and get away. I put my age up to 16, but I was unsuccessful for a starter, until I got a job on a ship called the Lech, a Polish ship. I joined that ship in 1940 as a galley boy. We sailed from Liverpool to London in a convoy and got bombed off the River Humber, but didn't get any damage. I then joined a troopship called the Duchess of Bedford. I signed on in late December 1940 and I was on that ship until April 1942. We were one of the last ships to leave Singapore. We left there on the 2nd February 1942 and it fell on the 15th. We took women and children from Singapore to Durban, dropped them off there, and sailed onto England with German prisoners of war. We dropped them off in Liverpool and then I left that ship.

At the time a schoolmate of mine, Chummy Weir, happened to be home. He was a young fellow like me, a seaman and he'd been sunk on his first ship, he was in a lifeboat for about a week. We always wanted to go to sea together, so this was our opportunity. We went to the shipping pool in Liverpool and signed onto the Gloucester Castle. We loaded her with ammunition and drums of aviation spirit. She was an old ship, wooden masts and wooden decks. We left on the 21st June 1942 and joined a slow convoy of ships off Belfast and then went out into the Atlantic. There was one or two sub scares.

The convoy broke up off Sierra Leone and we headed to Cape Town. A German raider, the Michel intercepted us. They came up at night and attacked and really blew hell out of us and set the aviation fuel in the forward deck on fire. We ran through the well deck and got up onto the boat deck and started to lower the lifeboats. The lifeboat I got into overturned and I got thrown in the water. That was the last I saw of my mate Chummy Weir. he went down with the ship. (*Ordinary Seaman Clement 'Chummy' Weir of the Merchant Navy, aged 16 is remembered on panel 52 of the Tower Hill Memorial in London, alongside nearly 24,000 other sailors of the Merchant navy and Fishing Fleets of WW2 with no known grave. Chummy's brother John was also killed during the war.*) I was in the water for about three quarters of an hour or something and I got picked up by the only lifeboat that got away. It was quite warm and the sea was just a bit of a swell. We saw this ship coming towards us and a searchlight going around and we thought 'hello, they're going to let us have it, machine gun us.' Some of us dived over the side. I didn't, I stayed in the boat. The light shone right on us and a voice sang out, 'come alongside, come alongside'. It was a German and that's when we knew it was a German raider.

We got aboard the raider and they had a ring of these sailors with machine pistols around. They asked if there were wounded so I went up. My hand was all swollen up. They blindfolded me, and I thought, hell, what's going to happen here? I was shaking, I was in shock. They took me through the ship, the idea of blindfolding me was so I wouldn't see parts of the ship, into the hospital. The Germans were really good

to us. The doctor came and had a look at my hand and one of them gave me a cigarette and then a cup of soup. Then they gave me a needle and I didn't know anything after that. I was out like a light.

The next thing I knew was when I woke up in bed and the first thing I saw was a big photograph of Hitler. I heard somebody saying 'Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!' I then realised I was on the German ship. I was in hospital for a while, and being a boy, I was only 16 at the time, they really looked after us. It was nice and clean, we had bunks with nice clean sheets and everything. A lot of these Germans were ex-merchant seamen. There was the odd one who was a Nazi, but you didn't take much notice of them. The thing we didn't like was when we were battened down, when they were sinking other ships. We were right down the bottom of the ship in these quarters, locked up. They sank another four ships while we were on the raider.

They used to allow us on deck, for maybe two hours in the afternoon, in lots. When they started to get a lot of prisoners you'd only get an hour on deck.

After about three weeks they transferred some of us to a supply ship called the 'Charlotte Schliemann'. It was a tanker, and that was a bit of a change in conditions. They put us down below in the hold, and it wasn't very nice. I think there were about 200 or 300 of us altogether. We were allowed up on deck at certain times of the day. They took us right down to the Roaring Forties, way down in the South Atlantic, and it was getting really cold. The food wasn't very nice. They used to send little packets of stew down and we used to have ship's biscuits, full of weevils, and what they called 'submarine bread' in tins, it was terrible. We were on that ship for about two months I think, cruising around. There were rats running all around, running across your feet. We used to try and have sing songs and that to try and keep our spirits up.

We thought we were going to Germany, but they told us they were going to Japan. We were really down in the dumps because we'd heard stories about the Japs. They said to us they were sorry they had to pass us over to the Japanese, because they didn't have much time for them either.

We got sunk on the 15th of July 1942 and it was September when we landed in Singapore. We went right down past Australia and past Java, up the Banka Straits. The Japs wanted fifty seamen, so we got loaded off there. They put us in trucks and ran us right across the island and you could see all the damage that had been done. They landed us in Selatar, the naval base on the other side of Singapore, on Jahore Straits, and put us on this river steamer called the Tung Wo. They gave us a bit of a lecture that if we tried to escape, we'd get our heads chopped off.

So, we settled down and divided ourselves into four watches. We had six Japanese marines in charge of us, and they didn't treat us too bad for a start off. The only trouble was food. We thought we'd be on rice, but we were on semolina and split peas. This was all we had for a fortnight. We had one of our cooks off the ship and he mixed up this stuff, and in the meantime we were catching fish. The Japs let us go fishing in the Straits and that was not too bad.

Then we asked if we could have some more meat. They used to put us on deck and we had to face their ensign as it was raised and bow to it. Then they made us do physical exercises like they did, and then they lined us up for a roll call. So the next

morning, the interpreter read out some names. I was one of them, and we had to step forward. The words he actually spoke I do not remember, but it was an insult for us to ask for more food, so we were going to be punished.. So they lined us up, ten of us I think, and one of the Japanese came back with a rope with a splice on the end of it, and gave us three right across the backside.

Then we started to twig what the Japs were like. One minute they'd be quite good and the next minute they'd switch. But it wasn't too bad, and we got in contact with a lot of other British seamen. There were survivors off the Prince of Wales and the Repulse in the naval base, and we were running launches for the Japs. The Japanese navy used to come in, the big aircraft carriers and all that. We were doing a lot of work on the Tung Wo to get it sea fit again, mostly painting and chipping and all that sort of thing. We didn't get paid for this of course. The food did improve a wee bit, but it was mostly rice, plus what bit of fish we used to get. We didn't have any footwear or anything.

Then after a while, about a year, they shifted us to a place called Loyang, which was a British naval base. They had a big mine depot and a big long jetty, but they'd blown it in half before the Japs got there. The Japs had us repairing all this, and they had a big warehouse there. They had us splicing wires and all this sort of thing. It wan't too bad; we had barracks but the food was pretty grotty. Every now and again some of the Jap navy guys would go to Singapore on leave and they'd come back drunk and start picking on us, start giving us a bit of a wallop. They used to take great delight in belittling you, making you feel small. If we'd done something wrong, they'd line us up into two rows facing one another and you'd have to hit me and I'd have to hit you. They used to laugh. They used to take great satisfaction in doing it in front of the native population.

We found the Chinese were very good to us. We used to get food off them. When we went out on working parties we'd raid a bit of stuff.; tapioca roots, bamboo shoots, snails, snakes, anything at all. I've eaten the lot; salamanders, lizards. It wan't too bad, but then things started to whittle back a bit. They wanted volunteers for the railway, but I didn't go. Some of my mates did and they never came back of course.

Things really got tough, about the last 18 months of the war. We were building an aerodrome where the Changi airport is now, that was all swamp country. We worked on that for 14 hours a day, and it was pretty grim. There were a few beatings. We were in 'C' block, on floor 3, at Changi Prison and most of them were merchant seamen, navy and a few air force. In fact, we even had Italians in with us. When the Italians packed it in, two submarines came into Singapore to hand over to the Japs. But the Japs banged them in the jail with us and took the submarines.

Inside the jail there were about 6,000 of us, and it was only built for 600. There were six to a cell, when it was only built for one. I was fortunate to have six best mates. We were all from the Birkenhead and Liverpool and me being the young fella, they looked after me, but I still went out on working parties and done my bit scavenging for food.

Outside the jail was another camp, where most of the Australians were; there were about 12,000 around Changi. Sanitation was terrible. We were full of lice. Hygiene was just nil. There were some showers there but you had to fight to get into

them. When they used to have monsoon rain, we'd stand out in the rain. I got beriberi and I had dengue fever at one stage, but I was lucky. I got a few skin diseases, tropical ringworm, and my ears got infected but otherwise I was reasonably fit. We had our own doctors but they had no medical supplies, only makeshift things. If you got a tooth pulled out you got no anaesthetic at all.

The comradeship in the camp was terrific. We'd play cards, we'd talk a lot, about food and sing! We used to do a lot of walking; inside there was a double wall, and there was a road right round inside and we used to walk around. We'd try to keep as fit as you could, but malnutrition took to us and near the end we got down a wee bit. We never got Red Cross parcels, we never got anything like that. We used to rely on what we could pinch or buy. There was a lot of black market going on. There were six of us off the same ship and whatever we could steal, coconuts or a pineapple, we used to pool together. If you got caught you'd get punished. The Japs were pretty strict on us trying to get some extra food.

We had radios in the camp, but only certain people knew where the radios were, I didn't. We used to get a lot of what we called borehole rumours, our toilets were boreholes dug into the ground in the courtyard, rumours that the Australians had landed in Malaya and all this. It was wishful thinking. We'd get one or two new prisoners come in and they'd give us a bit of information. The airport was not finished, but there was enough of it for planes to land on it. The Americans strafed it one day with Lightning planes, then the B-29s came over and dropped a few bombs. That's when we knew something was happening. Then they had us building fortifications. Every day we had to march out and salute the guards at the gate, and some of the guards were Korean and the Koreans were actually worse than the Japanese. There was also Indians. A lot of the Indians who were captured in Singapore went over to Japs side, they had what they called the Indian National Army, and they made us salute them too. The Japs did not give any of us younger guys any different treatment from the older guys, we also got a couple of hidings.

If it had not been for the atomic bomb, I don't think we would have lasted another six months. I was only six stone. It wasn't very pleasant, the last 12 months. All we got was rice and a bit of green stew. We used to eat snails or snakes, if you caught a snake in the bush. There was lice and other skin diseases. They were still dying when they liberated us; a lot of people were dying every day. They dropped 50 medical people by parachute first. A lot of the guards got belted up by some of our guys. I didn't see much of that. They herded them together and put them in a camp. The British navy came in off a cruiser called the Sussex, and we went aboard. I had a piece of bread with plum jam on it, the first piece of bread I'd seen for three and a half years. We were the first ship to land in Liverpool from the Far East with prisoners of war on it, so they organised a big welcome. I can always remember sailing up the Mersey river and seeing the Liver Birds. My eyes started to water a bit. There were thousands and thousands of people, with bands playing.

I managed to get a Red Cross nurse to take me home. As we drove up the street where my mother lived it had a big welcome home banner across the street. As I got out the car I was mobbed by a lot of people, then Mother and Father came from the house

and grabbed hold of me, crying and backslapping. I had been presumed dead. It was two years after the sinking they found I was alive, after I sent one prisoner of war card, the only one that was sent.

I don't blame the Japanese now; there is some good Japanese now. There was just a certain type then. I'll tell you, I didn't meet any good Japanese, not in them days.

When I did return to visit the UK in 1993 I was very surprised at the change in the UK compared to being home from Singapore in 1945. I found it very depressing and I could not settle down, so after about three months at home I went back to sea and in 1947 I jumped ship in New Zealand. Yes, I found the UK a lot different, the standard of living having improved a hell of a lot. But even though I have a soft spot for England, I love NZ. It is a different lifestyle; more relaxed, more open space, although it does have its faults.

I hope this does not bore you.

Yours faithfully

Lou Barron

Dear Mr Pringle

I am sending you the enclosed information my husband wrote re; being a NZ veteran from WWII. He is now in a private hospital in Dunedin and will not get home again. He has had Dementia for the last three years and was sent to hospital in Dunedin 18 months ago, as I couldn't look after him any longer.

My husband and I had six trips to Great Britain and Ireland from 1984 to 2000. We enjoyed each trip and you have a beautiful country. My husbands ancestors came from the Scottish borders and Ireland and mine came from Dumfries, Manchester and Wales. We can always remember our parents calling them the 'Old Country' or the 'Home Country'.

Memories of D-Day

I got called into the Navy early 1943. My basic training was at H.M.N.Z.S 'Philomel' I did my training as a radar operator. I only had four or five days final leave before being sent out to Avondale Racecourse to join the rest of the boys going on draft to Britain. This was a sailors dream come true. However, two or three days later, I had to be the one called back to 'Philomel' and this was a disappointment for me. One of the radar operators on H.M.N.Z.S 'Leander' had taken ill and I replaced him. It took a while to adjust to my new home but the crew were very good to me and I soon settled in. The 'Leander' had been damaged in action in the Pacific and we were taking her to Boston, USA for repairs. The trip across the Pacific was great; good weather and calm seas, and going through the Panama Canal a wonderful experience.

Before we left 'Leander' we were given the choice of going to H.M.N.Z.S

Achilles in Portsmouth, England or going on loan to the Royal Navy. Many of the crew accepted the latter offer and a few days later we left the 'Leander' and travelled to New York by train. We boarded 'Ile de France', a very large passenger liner, home until we reached Greenock, Scotland. As soon as we disembarked we were treated to Scottish hospitality; a big hearted welcome, something I would experience many times over the next 18 months. We were given doughnuts and hot drinks before boarding the troop train to Devonport, England.

After a week or so at Devonport we were allowed weekend leave so I headed up to London. It would be impossible for the average person to know just what many millions of civilians went through during the 'Battle of Britain'. The loss of life, the personal suffering and loss of homes and property were beyond our imagination. To be on the London Underground rail system at night was a real eye opener. At every station thousands of men, women and children taking their bedding below ground in the hope of having a few hours sleep. I was impressed at how tidy these stations were left; a contrast to the untidy sight that greeted Evelyn and me in London when we returned 40 years later.

Shortly after arriving at Devonport Eric Leith, my shipmate, and I were drafted to H.M.S 'Lawford'. We were informed that 'Lawford' was a Head Quarters ship for the Western front and all our training and exercises were done with this in mind. While all exercises were carried out during the hours of darkness the days were spent doing our normal ship's duties. Days became weeks and weeks became months and we were getting restless. During every night exercise the rumour would go round 'this is it', only to find it was just a dummy run along the south coast. Whenever a few more ships arrived there would be the usual speculation. After 'lights out' nights became long and lonely with many silent thoughts of the future. However ship numbers grew slowly, rumours rapidly. We were unaware of all the assembly points for the Army Units and Naval vessels, but it was obvious to us that we were one of the main ones.

A week or so before D-Day things really heated up. Thousands of ships, landing craft to battleships, began to assemble and we knew it would not be long now. Then there was the arrival of the enormous caissons, the size of them was unbelievable; 115 of these were towed across to the French coast and sunk to the sea bed to form a man made harbour, code named 'Mulberry'. Next to arrive at the assembly area were the massive drums of flexible pipe, code named 'Pluto' (Pipe line under the ocean.) These were towed across the Channel and laid on the sea bed in order to pump fuel to thousands of tanks and vehicles.

Eric and I were on watch together when we finally sailed on Monday evening 5th June. Later, on coming off watch there was a quiet atmosphere on the mess deck and certainly none of the usual chatter. 'Would I ever see home again?'

The weather was rough and the Channel at its worst for many years. Dawn D-Day June 6. Being a H.Q ship we led ships in and directed landing craft. The sea was rough and the beach had been spiked resulting in many landing craft becoming stranded. When not on watch we were allowed on the bridge for a short time to view proceedings. The RAF had certainly done a great job. They had dropped 900 tons of bombs on every enemy gun position and the damage was massive. Landings proceeded

all day and it was fairly quiet for us.

Just before dusk we were privileged to witness the arrival of transport planes towing gliders. These seemed to stretch back towards England for as far as one could see. Shortly after crossing the French coast the gliders were released and then hundreds of paratroops descended, with hundreds of different coloured parachutes with each colour denoting what they carried; arms, food, medical supplies etc. D-Day +1 a quiet day for us but not for the troops; losses were heavy and progress was slow. D-Day +2, 5am, and two Junkers 88 appear and machine gun our decks as well as hitting us amidships with a rocket. Our ship broke in half and was only held together by the steel deck although we were fortunate the rocket missed our munitions magazine by the narrowest of margins.

There was no panic and, being in the radar cabinet, Eric Leith and I were unaware of the damage we had suffered. We remained at our stations and awaited orders from the captain. Eric and I just had a few words with each other before the captain ordered to proceed to 'Abandon Ship' stations, so I checked I had sufficient air in my life jacket. This was very orderly but we were soon to learn the lifeboats were jammed due to the blast and could not be released. The engineer officer asked me how I was; I replied OK. He then asked me to help Sid Copeland over the side as he had been wounded. Sid said to leave him in the lifeboat and he would float off when our ship sank. This was impossible so I said he had to jump with me. In the water, a few yards away from the ship we felt a sudden suction as the ship began to sink and I had to let Sid go.

We were about 1 hour to 1 ½ hours in the water before I was picked up by a minesweeper, but somehow I didn't feel frightened. I was given a tot of rum and told Sid was in the sick bay after being picked up by a lifeboat. After being given a warm overcoat to put on, as they never had spare clothes on board, I went to see Sid and we both shed a few tears. This was the last time I saw Sid but he wrote to me from hospital and I still have the letter after more than 50 years. A small part of his letter reads. 'We all had a severe shaking pal, and as you no doubt know I thought my time had come. A man can't, and just doesn't say 'thank you', he hopes to live on, and await the day, when he can do a similar thing for his comrade.'

We transferred from the minesweeper to the Admiral's cruiser HMS 'Scylla' and I was issued with some dry clothing. About an hour later three enemy tanks broke through to the shoreline and started shelling us, and although they were near misses, they shook us up a bit. We spent a quiet afternoon.

From 'Scylla' we were transferred to 'Frobisher', a heavy cruiser, to be brought back to England. We were on her about half an hour when there was a great shaking of the ship. We were three decks down. The captain announced a 'Jerry' Stuka had just dropped a stick of eight bombs across us. Fortunately, none of them hit, the nearest being only 20 yards away. 'Frobisher' was then ordered to silence some enemy gun positions inland and she soon made short work of these. Shortly after this we headed home and arrived in Portsmouth about 1.00am. It was almost a sad trip without our ship and some of our cobbles.

We were given a few hours leave on V.E Day so we made our way down to the

streets of Plymouth and the whole area was crammed with people who had left their homes to come and celebrate the great day. It was impossible to get into the pubs and I can't remember if we managed to get a drink or not. We arrived in Wellington a week before Christmas 1945 and were given leave before returning to base at H.M.N.Z.S 'Philomel' Our time back there was spent in general routine duties but it did give us time to settle back into New Zealand lifestyle and prepare for our future. I landed a fairly good job and the time soon passed before I was discharged early April 1946.

Terence Scott

GIBRALTAR

Dear Mr Pringle

I read your article in the Gibraltar Chronicle. I am Gibraltarian. I trained for six months, in a depot behind Victoria Station, to learn how to use the twin barrelled rocket firing artillery before they posted me to the 3rd London Anti-Aircraft Regiment stationed at Hyde Park. We had 200 guns which fired two shells at a time against aircraft flying in to blitz London.

Winston Churchill came to visit his youngest daughter, Mary, she was in the ATS and she also served at the Hyde Park batteries on occasions and we had the chance to meet him. There was one night, London was burning as the Germans sent over 700 bombers. I shot one down and the plane came down where King's College is today. We were sent out to bring the pilots in, and as we approached they put their hands up shouting "Don't shoot!" in broken English. They really expected us to kill them, but we were not murderers, and took them back to Hyde Park, where they were handed over to the Military Police.

(In 1944 Joseph Jurado moved back to Gibraltar and after a few years as a policeman rejoined the British Army and served for another 20 years. After some time in Occupied Germany shortly after the war, he served throughout the Middle East and was in Libya the day Gaddafi overthrew King Idris in Libya. He was awarded the British Empire Medal for his service.)

Yours Faithfully
Joseph Jurado

U.K

Dear Mr Pringle

I am an 87 year old widow. When World War Two started I was living in Karachi in India with my English parents - in great luxury. However, I felt I had to

make a greater war effort than making bandages and sending food parcels, so I joined the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) and off I went in a troopship to Israel (then Palestine) to be trained. There I met many women of many nationalities and made lifelong friends.

My first posting was to Asmara in Eritrea which we had recently taken from the Italians. There we did all sorts of jobs. After 6 months I was sent back to Palestine to OCTU (Officer Training centre). The next posting was to Moascar, on the edge of the Suez Canal and the lakes - where I was in charge of a platoon of tough cockney women. By this time the Germans were getting much closer.

My last posting was to G.H.Q in Cairo, where I shared a flat with two other ATS officers. We worked hard from 8am to 1pm and again from 5pm to 8pm, but were much in demand and had a great time and also managed to see the Pyramids, temples and tombs of the Nile etc.

My future husband who I had first met in Moascar when he was recovering from a leg wound, now also worked in G.H.Q, lived in the Villa Tara on Gezira Island with many other men who came and went on secret missions behind enemy lines - Paddy Leigh-Fermor (*Fluent in Greek from his pre war travels, Leigh Fermor started off in the Irish Guards and became an officer in the Special Operations Executive tasked with organising resistance on the island of Crete against the Germans, returning three times, once by parachute. For two years, disguised as a shepherd, he lived in the mountains. Awarded the D.S.O for gallantry and later an OBE and a knighthood in 2004. After the war Sir Leigh Fermor became a renowned travel writer.*) and Bill Moss (*Ivan William 'Bill' Stanley Moss served with the Coldstream Guards and S.O.E in Crete. Awarded the Military Cross, he died in 1965 aged 44.*) amongst them (who captured the German general from Crete). (*On the night of the 26th April 1944 Major Leigh-Fermor and Captain Moss dressed as German military policemen alongside Cretan resistance fighters and Greek S.O.E operatives, stopped the car of General Heinrich Kriepe as he approached his villa outside of Heraklion. In disguise they approached his car to check ID papers. Fermor-Leigh thrust his gun into the car and threatened General Kriepe. Moss took the drivers seat and together they drove the car away from the villa. The team left false clues to dupe the Germans into thinking they had escaped by submarine and abandoned the car. By foot they travelled to the south of the island with the General, as German patrols began to pursue them. A British motor launch picked them up and they took the general to Egypt for interrogation. He was then sent to a POW camp in Canada. and was released from a camp in Wales in 1947.*)

There was also a Polish countess whose husband was fighting with the Polish brigade after they had escaped from Poland. One of my interesting jobs at the time was to spend a month in the desert close to the Pyramids, working at the Mena conference, where future war plans were being made, I got to know the sphinx well! (*The Cairo conference met in November 1943 to plan the future direction of the Allies war effort, with Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt in attendance. It took place at Mena House, a historic luxury hotel at the foot of the Pyramids, which was guarded by hundreds of anti aircraft weapons and an RAF observation post was even installed at the top of Cheops Pyramid.*)

I kept getting sandfly fever and eventually was sent back to England and ended up in Clitheroe until leaving the ATS, after my marriage. My husband, who was in the

Scots Guards, went back to his family business after the war was over and we were lucky enough to live in an old house where we brought up three lovely boys. When we first came here in 1952 we could go for walks without locking doors and never thought of burglar alarms etc Not any more; I now live alone and I am suspicious of strangers. - What does that say?

Yours Sincerely
Elizabeth Drew

P.S . My father - Dudley Newcomb, fought through all the worst battles of the Somme in the First World War. I have a shell case inscribed with all his postings. He was wounded three times and I have his Glengarry cap with a bullet hole through the ribbon at the back. He was in the Cameron Highlanders.

He never spoke of his experiences and died at 50. He would be horrified with life in England today.

Dear Mr Pringle

With reference to your appeal to ex servicemen. I wish to inform you that I joined the Royal Air Force on the 21st August 1941 and was eventually released on the 6th December 1946. I was born on 6th April 1921. I left school in April 1935 and started work the Monday after my last Friday at school. For the last two years of my school life I had seven miles to cycle and seven miles back. There was no meals provided, so I took sandwiches and paid 1/2 penny for a small bottle of milk.

My father was a gardener and worked for (should we say the landed gentry). I was employed with him, my wage was 10 Shillings a week and my dinner in the servants quarters. Unfortunately, after I had worked there for six months, my father became ill and had to spend six weeks in hospital. His and my employment were terminated and as we lived in a tied house we had to get out and someone, somewhere found us a condemned cottage to live in. Living at home at that time was my mum, a brother five years older than me and a sister four years younger. When the family were moved into the condemned cottage my older brother went away to work in the gardens of a wealthy landowner and I was sent to work as a pantry boy at Rugby public school. (I suppose our parents could not afford to keep us.) Hours 6am to 10pm, seven days a week with an afternoon off once a fortnight. I didn't realise what was happening and I quite enjoyed it. After spending two years as a pantry boy my father fully recovered, and we again obtained employment as gardeners and I remained as such until I joined the services. At that time I didn't really understand life.

I volunteered for aircrew, went in as a flight mechanic. Taught about Merlin Astro engines, very good training. My first flight in a Blenheim fighter bomber - it rattled so much on take off I never thought it would make it! Whilst I was at Cranfield I saw a trainee pilot absent mindedly walk into an engine propeller, and I saw an aircraft coming into land, as another was about to take off. Told to go round again, but didn't

make it, crashed into a tree, and I was first to arrive at the crash. Although not mates, on the same squadron, so one felt for them dying.

In March 1943 I was posted abroad. I boarded the troop ship 'Windsor Castle' in the Firth of Clyde. We set sail on Tuesday 16th March at 6.30am (I kept a diary.) I noted that the food was good and there was long queues and that Player Cigarettes were 1/8 for 50. Our quarters were midway between midships and the stern. I slept on the floor, underneath the long tables. The trip went very well, sea not too choppy. Didn't know where we were going, but we went through the straits into the Mediterranean. On the Saturday we had three air raid warnings; nothing happened. On Tuesday 23rd March at 2.30am the ship was torpedoed. We were instructed to abandon ship. Nets were put overboard, which we climbed down and found a raft. With seven other chaps we paddled away from the ship, which was going down. The sea was very calm and the moon was shining quite brightly. Land was never in sight, so we paddled aimlessly. Eventually, we were picked up by a ship, HMS Eggesford. It was packed, some chaps were not in very good condition and there was burials at sea. I was never afraid, just excited, it was war.

We were finally taken to Algiers, where we went on the beaches, some five or six miles from the city. We received quite a welcome that night from the German and Italian air forces. In fact a fighter bomber crashed some fifty yards from where we were camped. Again, I was never afraid, just a sort of excitement.

I was posted to work and live in the city of Algiers, billeted in a school and was overhauling Merlin engines in a very large garden. At that time it was French North Africa, a lot of French living there, but many more Arab. French people were employed to help us with the engines and the Arabs to do the cleaning up. This is how it was and we thought no differently. We didn't mix with the Arabs, although we seemed to get on with them quite nicely, but at the same time be a little bit wary. They always treated us with respect.

In November 1943 I was posted to Maison Blanche, an airfield seven miles from Algiers and worked testing engines. By this time the North African campaign was over and the war was a long way away. German prisoners of war were brought into our camp and I can remember talking to one of their officers in early '44 and he was convinced that it was only a matter of time before Germany won. They had something they were going to drop on us and that would be that. (*Perhaps, the officer knew about the V1 flying bomb in secret production. The first one was launched at London on 13th June 1944.*)

Time came and time went, just like being in civvy street. Going to work, back to sleeping quarters. Playing cards, football, cricket, table tennis, but a long way from home. During this time I kept applying for aircrew, passing medicals and exams and on 19th September 1944 I was selected for aircrew as a flight engineer. Although I was selected, nothing happened. I believe that by not being selected early for aircrew I did not give my best. In hindsight, perhaps I was fortunate to have remained as ground staff.

You asked did I struggle to adjust? Yes, I did. Life was no better than it had been before. There was no support for veterans. You made your own way. My opinion is that I am sure that life has improved for the working man (wage earner) but not a

great deal.

I have enjoyed my whole life and I still am doing so. We celebrate our diamond wedding anniversary next month.

All the best
George Haynes

Dear Nick

As a young lad, almost 18 years old, I travelled to Plymouth, the Royal Marines Barracks, Stonehouse, on 4th November 1942, to become a 'Recruit Marine'. After pounding the barracks square for six months, I finally became a Marine. Training was hard and tough, and by the time we had finished our training we drilled as 'one man'. In July/August 1943, I had my first posting. In the Navy (as 'old salts' know) it's called a 'draft chit' and for me it was a mystery trip as we were kitted out in tropical gear and off we went to entrain at Plymouth North Road Station. We had no idea where we were going - secrecy was the word in those days. The train went through Bristol (my home town), then Crewe, Carlisle, until we got to Greenock, Glasgow and there on the quayside was the liner 'Queen Mary'. Once on board we were told we were going to be orderlies to Sir (then Mr) Winston Churchill and the Quebec Conference.

We were billeted in the library, and I very well remember my first night. I was on duty outside the dining hall, with the instruction that no one must be allowed in without a pass (even though we were at sea). The great man, Mr Winston Churchill and his daughter, Mary, approached, what shall I do? Must ask him for his pass and said 'your pass, Sir', he turned to his daughter and said 'I believe my face is my pass'. I was very embarrassed as he entered the dining hall. When we arrived in Halifax we were treated as VIPs on the two day journey on a Canadian Pacific train to Quebec and our conference duties. Whenever I hear the song 'You are my sunshine' I recall the memories of Quebec as the cafes were all playing this song being sung by Bing Crosby. Duties over and back to the UK where another 'draft chit' was waiting for me.

It was off to Scapa Flow in the Orkneys to join HMS Jamaica, a cruiser who was part of the Home Fleet. Our duties were to guard the Russian Convoys, when they left the UK, up into the Arctic, around the North Cape, the Barents Sea to Kola Inlet. It was very cold indeed, especially when it was time to chip the ice off the guard rails and lines etc.

Our first action was on Boxing Day, 1943, when we heard that the German battle cruiser 'Scharnhorst' was at sea. This was confirmed when the commander tannoyed the ship's company 'Do you hear there, do you hear there? The Scharnhorst has put to sea and I will be piping action stations shortly'. The Scharnhorst had been responsible for sinking many Merchant Navy ships. We were at anchor in Iceland, when the news broke. We put to sea and eventually she was sighted. Of course it was pitch black.

My own memory of the engagement as an 18 year old was the fear of the

Jamaica being hit when the Scharnhorst's star shells lit up the dark sky and of the red glow on the horizon when she went down. The Jamaica was named as the ship that torpedoed her. On return to Scapa Flow we lead the Home Fleet in with Battle Ensign flying. I think it was a fine day and the ships at anchor cheered us in.

However, in 2000 the wreck was found and the divers counted 11 torpedo hits. So we all have a share of putting her down. 1,932 of her ship's company perished in those icy cold waters of the Arctic and only 36 survived. Our hearts have now mellowed and we remember those who lost their lives in the action and also remember the gallant men of the Merchant Navy and the Royal Navy who lost their lives with Russian Convoys to Kola Inlet, North Russia.

Over the years the remaining members of the Scharnhorst's Survivors Club, have visited us at the invitation of the Russian Convoy Club, regrettably both clubs have now been disbanded, as there are only a few of us veterans left. I attended the final Scharnhorst reunion at Wilhelmshaven in November 2000, they put on a good 'splash' to say farewell.

My memories on the "J" were good and bad - the bad bits having to fight off the homosexuals - just like in the middle of the night of having to move your hammock out of the way of wandering hands. That's all I will say but I have been against it for the rest of my life.

UK at the moment in my eye is going down hill and it stemmed from Members of Parliament and Local Authority officials - once elected they become a "different animal" - just look at the MPs with their expenses - disgraceful - no wonder they did not want their expenses published.

War, conflict and fighting still continue today. Our thoughts go out to the service personnel who are serving in areas of the world mainly Iraq and Afghanistan. Conflict is so fruitless, as lives are lost, wives are made widows, husbands find themselves widowers and children become fatherless. Unfortunately, the world has not yet fully learned to live in peace. Human suffering, misery, and grief still continue, because of our inhumanity towards one another. Ambition, greed, envy, old habits and injustices - all these are the cause of conflict and of war.

Crossing the Bar
Alfred Lord Tennyson

(When someone connected with the sea dies, the expression 'He has crossed the bar' is used.)

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When what which drew from out the boundless sleep

Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark.

For tho' from out our borne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

John Hale

Dear Mr Pringle

It was with interest that I saw your article in the Evening Post. I am now an 84 year old widow. I served in the ATS for four and a half years, which was quite an experience for me, having been brought up on a farm on the edge of Dartmoor. I did my square bashing at Honiton, near Exeter. Then to H.Q AA Command, which was Horfield Prison. I experienced the Bristol bombing. I was married in 1943. My husband was serving on HMS Offa, a destroyer on the Russian convoys. *(The ship entered service in 1941 and was part of Convoy PQ-4, that sailed from Iceland to Arkhangelsk in November of that year to deliver supplies to the Russians. As part of convoy PQ-18, it helped rescue the sixty one survivors from MV Atheltemplar, a burning British oil tanker that was hit by a U boat torpedo whilst in convoy. The convoy had been spotted by a German flying boat on the 12th September 1942 and was chased away by Royal Navy Sea Hurricanes aboard the carrier, HMS Avenger. On the 13th, a large formation of German planes attacked at 15.00hrs with bombs and over 30 torpedoes, resulting in eight ships being sunk. In the evening more air attacks occurred and gunners aboard Atheltemplar managed to down a Ju-88. At 3.10hrs in the early hours of the 14th, U-457 managed to penetrate the convoy south west of Bear Island, Norway and attacked. Two days later on the 16th, HMS Impulsive dropped depth charges and hit the U-Boat. Korvetten Kapitan Karl Brandenburg and his forty four men were killed with no survivors.)*

At 0.16hrs on the 26th January 1944, Fort Bellingham a British steam merchant ship was hit by a torpedo from U-360 and was damaged, making it fall behind its convoy. At 06.53hrs another U-Boat from the wolf pack attacked. U-957's torpedo sunk the merchant ship. Of the 76 crew, 36 were killed and Cdr R.F. Leonard leading HMS Offa managed to rescue 35 survivors. Two of the Fort Bellingham crew were taken POW by U-957. Gerd Schar the U-boat captain was awarded the Iron Cross, the German Cross and Knights Cross. He died in South Africa in 1983.)

What do I think of the country today? It's difficult to compare, as we had so little and had to just get on with it. My husband was invalided out of the Navy after witnessing the dropping of the Atom bomb in Japan. Technology today is quite amazing. The most worrying thing for me, is all the single mothers bringing up families

on their own and so much lack of self discipline. I was taught discipline and responsibility in the Army. It has stood me in good stead all these years.

Yours Faithfully
Mrs Rosa Jones

Dear Mr Pringle

Regarding your letter in the Pontefract and Castleford Express about veterans. I may be able to help. My name is Ronald Reeves. I am 87 years old and I was a sergeant in the 15th Scottish Reconnaissance Regiment.

I was the leading patrol commander of an armoured car patrol unit, which normally consisted of three cars and took part in the invasion from Arromanches in France to Lubeck in Germany. To give you some idea of what it was like to be a leading patrol commander I would like to tell you of my adventurous patrol.

It was when we were racing through Germany and on what was known as a 'Swan'. As a cockney by birth my interpretation was 'bashing on regardless', which meant to keep going until heavy resistance was met. Backup was always available very quickly. The patrol was a daytime one. My crew set off as normal and within minutes reported "Enemy digging in to our left". "Carry on" was the order from command. A few minutes later came to a T junction. No resistance surprisingly. "Turn right" from command. Carried on and about 1/2 mile saw a German officer coming out of the woods. Relieved him of his Luger. Sent him back down road to backup car behind. "Go on" came command, then had only gone about 50 yards when I spotted a German lorry coming at fair speed towards us. We both stopped within 15 yards apart. Quick appraisal saw SS man in black uniform in passenger seat. That meant big trouble so brrrr and both driver and him didn't know what hit them.

A soldier who had jumped out of the back of the lorry got caught in my spray of bullets and was wounded in the leg. Put him on bonnet of my car and transported him back to backup to look after. (Our cars could go backwards as quickly as forward as they had an extra steering wheel in the cockpit to steer out of trouble.) Carried on then came across two German soldiers running across the road to their machine gun nest. Brrr and they gave themselves up immediately. Sent them back up the road. Carried on and came face to face with seven Germans in shirt sleeves sitting on a fence. Gave themselves up without any shots being fired. Back up there in seconds to deal with them.

Went into an adjacent building and at the end found masses of wireless equipment with operator there. Couldn't let them give our position away so Brrr and he slumped over his equipment. Another short burst hoping to put his wireless out of order. Then calamity, my car would not start so backup took up patrol. Told to tag on behind when mechanics got it going. They found two more machine gun nests and then an airfield with planes less than a 100yds away. Carried on and came to the outskirts of a large town. End of patrol. Town was Wuppertal and the wireless unit that I had found

was in fact a direction finding station for the airfield. This account may have sounded callous but remember it was just a little bit more to help shorten the war.

Reflection on this patrol was how different it was when we advanced through France, Belgium and Holland where you would enter a town or village and it would be deathly quiet and no sounds would mean enemy were about, but more often the town or village would be deathly quiet then suddenly one national flag would appear from an upstairs window, then another, then another and so on and within minutes the whole town or village would turn out throwing flowers at you and in one town, boxes of matches and the girls would be vying to kiss you scrambling all over your vehicle. That seemed to make worthwhile the effort needed to get there in the first place. It became jokingly known as 'Liberating a few villages before breakfast'.

Regarding the struggle to adjust to civvy life, yes it was, but given the love of our loved ones who had been warned by the government that we would be different people and the fact that our old bosses had to take us back did help. In my case getting accommodation was the worst thing as my wife and baby and I lived with my two other brothers who had families in a three bedroom house rented by my mother and which we had been brought up in. That was seven people in one house. I decided to move to Wakefield in Yorkshire from Watford, as my wife had been reared there, where I thought we could find housing easier.

After about seven months living with her mum and dad we did find a bed sit. Then strangely and I never knew how he found me, a colonel came to our door and asked if I would train conscripted men for two years in the Terriers, whom after the war was over had to serve by law two years in the forces followed by two years in the Territorials. I jumped at this as I was feeling in need of something to do in my spare time. I was to keep my former rank of sergeant during this period. I did this stint with much happiness. The extra money was appreciated too as my engineering job was rather boring and not too well paid. I believe that everyone when they leave school and reach 18 should have this conscription of two years in the forces followed by two years in the Terriers which will give them a trade but more important discipline. I found my trainees were very keen to learn more and had no moans about having to do their stint. As for me I decided that a career in mining would give me a sufficient boost for my ego and spent 31 years in the trade, the last 24 years before retirement in various management grades.

I hope I have not bored you too much.

Yours Truly
Ronald R Reeves

1. My happiest moment/s during the war was to see the sea of ecstatic and smiling faces of the inhabitants of villages and towns as they flocked into the streets on liberation. My saddest moments were when these same people would gleefully show you decapitated and mutilated bodies of the enemy. How they must have suffered to do such a horrible and disgusting thing. They always got a rebuke from me.
2. I lost many friends during the war, but I try to erase their memories as this only

brings back sadness.

3. I have many lighter and funny memories of the war and these are the ones I keep in mind, such as the time when we were forming the regiment from three independent recce corps. A real mixture of a regiment we were, one from the Scottish area, a Hertfordshire unit (in which both my elder brother and I were in) and a Midlands unit. We all got on very well together except for the making of porridge, which the Scots wanted salt in and we wanted sugar. My squadron was stationed at Felton park near Morpeth/Newcastle and we had a football ground with goal posts at each end as normal. Well, on one of the posts a swarm of wasps had formed. Being soldiers of course that was the main target. Luckily someone came to remove the swarm before they hit it. God knows what would have happened if someone had hit it.

4. You asked my opinion of the country today. The quick answer is not much, but I am sure that with the British people being as they are we shall eventually rally together and pull ourselves out of the mess our bankers have got us into.

Recces don't say much as a rule because fact is stranger than fiction and people tend to think you are telling a tall story.

To Nick

I have just been listening to my news tape, which I have every week from Kennete Cassette in Thatcham. I am writing because it is a very nice bright day. I am registered blind and it is the only way I can get any news from the papers. I was registered blind in 1985. I was in the ATS until 7th June 1945. I trained at Warrington, then Reading. I met my husband in the Army, he was in the artillery. We were stationed all round Wales; Cardiff, Newport and other places. I was a cook and we had to be up early to cook for Home Guards coming off duty. Then we had to cook for the men in the camp. I was sometimes moved to the officer's kitchen to cook for them. *(As the saying goes 'an Army marches on it's stomach', and the cooks of the ATS played a vital role in keeping the Army well fed, essential for good morale. The young women after basic training, including route marches etc, were trained in all aspects of cooking for up to 1,000 men including baking, butchery of various animals and how to cook on all types of field kitchens in a battle zone setting. They also learnt to put together improvised wood fired ovens, and practised cooking in gas masks and tin hats. The course lasted three months. A typical cook's day would be from 8.30 to 4.30 and would be busy and varied from cutting and frying chips, roasting meat, making soups to baking buns and swiss rolls.)* I have not seen or heard from anyone since I left the the Army.

J Shennan - Age 87

Dear Mr Pringle

I am consumed by the desire to write about my country and how over my eighty odd years, it has changed beyond recognition. This desire is mixed with fear that I will find it frustrating not to fully express my despair, sadness and anger at what I have witnessed in the name of 'progress'. It has been the subtle, insidious and systematic destruction of centuries of tradition, of the facts of history that once made my country the envy of the world. Look at how cleverly the very foundations have been destroyed.

The church all but ignored. History as taught in schools carefully structured. Manufacturing all but vanished. Justice and law and order reduced to a string of sentencing restrictions aimed at protecting the villain, yet banning the victim from seeking protection. Respect for authority all but limited to the over 50 year olds. Immigration and the much vaunted (but not voted on) multi-culturism have instead given us segregation and fragmentation. Education and health services gradual decline is well documented. Thus the very roots of this once great country have and are being destroyed. It must surely be time to call a halt to this debasing of all so many who died for yet we took for granted.

I cite four examples of what the public may have now forgotten, in themselves they are minute in the overall scheme of things. But the fact they occurred at all will tell us all just what we have come to.

The Passport Service has been renamed the Identity and Passport Service - at a cost of £450,000. Why? The Inland Revenue and HM Customs & Excise are now known as HMRC - at a cost of £720,000. Why? A company found negligent in a recent railway disaster had a £4 million fine imposed. Now the £400,000 for the Olympic logo. And rising! Who do you think will pay? You may well ask, could not a better use have been made of this money?

More in sorrow than in anger.

Terry Galligan
Ex Merchant Seaman

Dear Mr Pringle

I am a veteran of WW2 and feel compelled to write on behalf of all the young men and women who died fighting for this country. I am disgusted at the state of affairs, as they would now be.....They lost their lives for what?

I was 17 yrs. of age when declaration of war was announced, from the pulpit in Church during the Sunday service. To say we were a little afraid of the unknown is an understatement. War was expected, sandbags and Anderson shelters had sprung up all over the place and black-out curtaining was being bought by the yard. We had the first siren warning almost immediately, but thankfully it was a false alarm. Black-out was upon us and we carried our little boxes containing gas masks, all the time. Life carried on normally for a little while, but friends and workmates started to be called up for

active service and a family circles gradually diminished.

Dec.12th. and 15th. 1940 (Thurs. and Sun.) Sheffield, where I was born and bred, suffered a Blitz.....it was dreadful. Wave after wave of bombers almost all night and we were cooped up with neighbours, in the shelter, almost below ground. My Dad had built bunk beds for my twin brother and me, but we never slept in them, it was too crowded to lie down because all the neighbours in the yard wanted to be together. The only light we had was one candle and I remember the old lady next door to us sitting next to me drinking the brandy which was supposed to be for medicinal purposes only. The next day we had to "Shank's pony" to and from work, walking 3 to 4 miles each time, in to the City (no excuses those days) and that went on for weeks. All form of transport ceased and we had to walk in all weathers over rubble and dripping water mains, through a district that had had a lot of damage. It was a nightmare.

My boyfriend (who is now my husband) used to call for me and we would walk to work together most days. Jack had volunteered for the R.A.F. and in 1941 was called up for service and sent to Southern Rhodesia for Pilot training, supposedly for 9 months, but he was held back as an instructor and didn't return until 1945.

In 1943, just before my 21st. birthday, I was conscripted into the services and was lucky enough to have my choice to join the W.A.A.F. I did my square-bashing (Drill) at R.A.F. Innsworth, Gloucestershire and at the end of the course we had to put on a show. I could tap-dance (and still do) so was roped in for the chorus and a solo Dress material being almost none existent the producer went in to Gloucester and came back with some patriotic serviettes which we sewed to our issue bras, and made little skirts to wear over our Air Force Blue "bloomers." We thought we looked great and everybody thought the idea a good one, we just had to make sure that we didn't tear them, good thing they only had to last for the one performance.

From Innsworth, along with quite a few more "sprogs" (new girls), I was posted to Whitley Bay in Northumberland, a hellish journey, having to stand up or sit on our kit-bags all the way. Being a short-hand typist, I was put to work in the Orderly room of Station Headquarters and eventually promoted to the Adjutant's Office, even though I was still only ACH/GD (Aircraft hand/general duties) at the time.

We had a pig of a W.A.A.F. Officer and when she came to inspect us, had us drilled on the lower prom facing the sun which reflected on to the sea, not very pleasant. I remember her once saying "Now I know what it is like to drill 70 wet, dead fish" all done and said for the benefit of the holiday makers who came to watch us. There were a lot of barbed wire defences all over the place and she took great delight in marching us towards them and not giving the order to about turn until we were about four paces away, she was not very popular.

After about three to four months we were allowed to re-muster and I applied to be a T/P/O (Teleprinter Operator). I had quite a problem with the aforementioned officer, to let me do this because at the time said that I would like to go into Safety Equipment (parachute packing etc.) as far as that was concerned she said "NO WAY" she would have me scrubbing the cook-house floors first. I stood my ground and in the end she agreed for me to apply to be a T/P/O. I was accepted and was sent to R.A.F. Radio school at Cranwell College. in Sept 1943. It was a 10 weeks course, on shift work,

6p.m to 2p.m. and 2p.m. to 10p.m alternate weeks. We had to take a test at the end of each fortnight before being allowed to move on to the next step of the training and if you didn't make the grade you were either moved back a fortnight or scrubbed altogether and sent to train as a cook. At the end of the 10 weeks we sat an exam and I passed ok which meant an upgrade in my pay to 2s.2d. per day.

From Cranwell I was posted to Grantham to a place called St Vincent's House which was gradually being taken over by the Americans (it had been No.5. Group Headquarters of the Dam Buster era). We shared watches (duties) with the Yanks and as some of them were new arrivals from the States we had the task of training them on a one to one basis, more or less. Because we were attached to their unit, so to speak we were allowed their P.X.(stores,) rations and it was like having Christmas every week. Plenty of gum, choc bars and biscuits as well as other small items such as face cloths, pens etc. We were allowed 140 cigarettes a week Camel ,Chesterfields, Lucky Strike to name but a few. Being a non-smoker I used to send mine in the laundry parcel I sent home, for my Dad to have. The Yanks had plenty of money too and were over generous to the girls who dated them but a lot of us refused to allow this to happen too often, it did not seem right to take advantage of their good nature; most of the ones I worked along side were gentlemen.

On New Year's eve, those of us who weren't on duty were collected by truck and driven to Cottesmore camp and we had a whale of a time dancing the year out, jitterbugging and feeding our faces with food we hadn't thought existed anymore. It didn't matter that we had a long uncomfortable ride back in an army lorry and on duty the next day, we were tired but happy.

Our watch arrived for 8.a.m duty on June 6th. (D Day) 1944 to lots of shushes and "Don't talk to each other" orders from the R.A.F. Sergeant in charge of us. Stupid man, all signals were in code anyway! We were kept very busy, sparks almost coming out of our machines. We'd had a suspicion something was afoot 'cos a few days beforehand all leave and passes had been cancelled. However, this did not deter my friend and I from getting up early on our day off, walking to the outskirts of Grantham and hitching a ride to Sheffield. I had written home to say we would visit (no telephone for us) so we kept our promise. We had to come back the same day otherwise we would have been put on a charge. How we managed it all in the one day I don't know, I had no sense of direction and there were no signposts, but make it we did. There was one worrying moment on the way back when the truck driver stopped and got out of his cab (it was a transport lorry) and left us for what seemed ages and we had no idea how much further we had to go or even where we were. We were also starting to wonder as to whether we would be back in time for our 23.30 duty. I remember we were late but can't think what excuse we gave but luckily we got away with it. How we made it through the night I don't know but we were young and managed not to fall asleep during the long hours of pounding our machines. The Yanks eventually took everything over and we were posted en bloc to Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire. I should have gone to Uxbridge but exchanged posting with a Londoner; worse days work I ever did.

Bletchley Park was known as Station X, very hush-hush so, as they sang in one

of the war-time songs "We won't talk about that". All I can say is that before we could work in the Park we were vetted and as this took about three weeks we were put to all sorts of menial tasks. Unfortunately for me and my friend, we were put on ablution duties cleaning toilets etc., it was awful. Despite discipline and hygiene lectures there were still the odd bods who broke the rules and on occasions our duties weren't exactly pleasant.

The W.A.A.F. camp left a lot to be desired (there were Army, Navy, Air Force and Civilians at the Park). Navy and civilians were looked after the best, living in private homes etc. Army and R.A.F. personnel had to put up with concrete huts with bitumastic floors, very sparse, and what seemed miles to the toilets and baths.

Conditions weren't good at all and the only way out of the place was in a "box", on medical grounds, or by volunteering to go to India, which my friend did but at her medical, was found to have suspected T.B. and was posted to hospital for treatment. There wasn't much in the way of entertainment, morale was pretty low, and illness overtook some of us. The whole of our hut had dysentery (35 girls) except me. I was greedy and had scabies and the treatment for that was horrible. I had to go to sick quarters every day, have a bath and scrub myself until the sores bled, dry myself off and then the orderly with a brush, slapped an some sort of paste which stung and had to dry slowly before I could get dressed again. I felt very degraded and was spurned by everyone. They assumed that I was dirty, which made me very depressed. Sickness and depression dogged me all the time I was stationed there and eventually I had to face a Medical Board which entailed a trip to R.A.F. Halton Hospital. I was offered a discharge an medical grounds, but refused it. The alternative was a posting to R.A.F. Norton, Sheffield where I was allowed to live at home, attending camp only for duties and pay parades, etc.

I remained at Norton until my demobilisation in October, 1945 and during that time, my fiancée came home from S. Rhodesia and we were married just after V.E. Day on 19th May, 1945.

The great has gone out of Britain, leaving a gaping hole in which lots of things have disappeared into; such as courtesy, respect for people and their property, morality, decency, thoughtfulness, honesty and what is lacking most of all - discipline.

I am not saying that everyone is tarred with this brush but for quite a percentage of this decadent society there is a very small word which says it all, greed.

Eileen Pickering
Ex member of the WAAF
Born 1922

Dear Nick

Re; your email in the Banbury Cake. I tell it as it was. No political correctness; no pandering to sensibilities or nationalities. Restricting people's freedom to speak leads to Fascism.

It was January 1940, why I volunteered to join the Forces I will never know. My father, uncle and maternal grandfather had seen service in the Army.

PEGASUS BRIDGE

There was a cafe by the bridge and a women was serving wine to the engineers and paratroopers. The engineers had arrived to repair the bridge had it been blown up. No one seemed to want to cross the bridge as it was under fire from the Germans on the far bank. I figured the odds were against one vehicle crossing it alone and being the focus of attention. I decided to have a look at the village beyond the café. We had been told that the 21st Panzer Division were out on exercise in this area. So much for all that rubbish about Hitler sleeping over and no one daring to wake him so he could order the Panzers to attack. We expected momentarily to hear the rumble of their tracks coming through the village.

What I learned much later was that the Typhoons of 2nd TAF had spotted their column of German tanks as they entered the village on the far side. They loosed their rockets and knocked out the first three tanks, completely blocking the street. This saved our bacon.

In the street was the body of an infantryman beside his burning bicycle, killed by a mortar round. A Sherman tank came rumbling down the street. The driver's face showed shock as he saw the body, but he couldn't stop and the tank crunched over it. (We were told that German Panzer Division Orders said that an advance would continue at all costs, even over the bodies of their own wounded. War is hell.)

I went back to the Jeep and was in time to see the remains of the French Commando arrive. They hurled smoke grenades across to the middle island in the river and as soon as there was enough cover they raced across the bridge with my Jeep tagging along behind. Beyond the bridge I overtook them and was soon going along a deserted road. It was eerie. I turned left at the first opportunity, going back up the far side of the Orne. After a couple of miles I came to a farmhouse at some crossroads where the vehicles of 3rd S.S Brigade were drawn up. We had arrived.

I parked the Jeep across the road by the side of a hedge where there was a shallow ditch which we could use as a slit trench. I went across to the farmhouse and found Lord Lovat and his staff in the front room. I told him the French Commando were on the way and asked if I could transmit the position of his forward troops. He nodded to his staff captain who pointed out the positions on a wall map. I took down the map references.

This message was essential to prevent the Brigade being bombarded by friendly fire. The Command obviously was more intent on meeting their threat to their front. The Warspite was lying just offshore. Her fifteen inch guns had already taken out shore defences and they were preparing to range further inland.

When I got back to the Jeep Jimmy had already established contact with the Div ship but couldn't raise Portsdown. Looking at a nearby tree I thought I would run a wire to it and make an inverted L aerial to give us more power. Then I set to work coding the message. We used Slidex Code in those days. It was a chart with two co-

ordinates. Some of the cross references spelled out whole words or useful phrases. The Germans could break this code by guessing all the cross references in a couple of days, so the chart had to be changed frequently.

We got the message off and received an acknowledgment. We weren't to know what an effect it had at Portsdown. I learned later that it was the first news they had from this end of the landings. The fields we held formed the dropping zone for the gliders of the 6th Airborne Division. The airborne lads were sitting out on the runway with the engines of the Stirlings ticking over waiting for the word go. It was about 2pm in the afternoon.

In an hour or so the Stirlings were circling overhead with their trains of gliders. The fields where they were due to land were sown with 'dragons teeth', thick tree trunks spaced about twenty feet apart. We could see the fields clearly from our position. As the gliders came in every one was wrecked, wings being sheared off right and left. One glider overshot the main field and the pilot just lifted his glider over the line of trees skirting it, only to find a small field beyond with another line of trees facing him. He fishtailed desperately to slow the glider and in a final manoeuvre turned the glider completely sideways to impact the hedge. The paratroopers all got out.

We were getting a load of Tactical Reconnaissance (TacR) reports. Some about the diversionary Commando raid north of Le Havre. I took these over to the command centre and was just in time to see an impressive figure arrive in his dropping rig. He announced himself as 'Wilmott BBC'. It was Chester Wilmot, the legendary war correspondent, who had managed to survive that rough landing of the gliders. Later on we tuned in to the BBC and heard his report. (*An Australian, Chester Wilmot first came to Europe in the 1930's and attended a Nuremberg Rally in Germany as part of a debating tour. During the war he reported for the ABC and BBC. He was at the siege of Tobruk in North Africa, in Papua when the Japanese invaded and after landing in the glider he reported right up until he witnessed the German surrender. In 1953 he was one of the reporters for the Queen's coronation. A year later, after surviving the perils of war, he was killed aged 42 when the civilian BOAC plane he was travelling on crashed into the Mediterranean Sea with no survivors.*) How he managed to transmit it verbatim in speech, through to London in a few hours is still a mystery to me. He must have had some state of the art radio equipment, not available to us. It was a gripping account of how the Commandos had been assaulted by waves of German infantry. (He didn't mention that they were Cossacks in German uniforms.) The Commandos waited until the charge was nearly upon them and then cut the infantry down to virtually the last man with their automatic weapons.

Later that night DC3s came over dropping supplies. The German flack (Flugabwehrkanonen) opened up on them and we saw with dismay that we were completely surrounded by streams of tracer arcing up into the sky. One of the DC3s was hit and vanished almost instantly in a violent explosion; it must have been carrying ammunition.

We later became painfully aware that the Germans never seemed to run short of ammunition for their anti-aircraft guns. This was because the Bofors, Oerlikon and Hispano ammunition came from factories in neutral Sweden and Switzerland, that could not be attacked by our bombers. So it irked me after the war when Sweden and

Switzerland made much capital out of being the blameless neutral peacemakers, when they had profited so much from their arms trade with our enemy. An apology would have been in order.

After the DC3s, the Luftwaffe came over and dropped anti-personnel bombs on us. These bombs had a rod about half a metre long attached to the nose so they exploded above the ground and scattered deadly fragments in all directions. We were fortunate, having the ditch to lie down in. Some of the drivers across the road who took shelter under their vehicles were killed. It was as I lay next to my operator, Jimmy Green, that I had become aware he was shivering with fright from head to toe. Jimmy was a youngster of about 19 who had only been in the Army less than a year. He was of slim build, with a mop of curly hair and wore thick lensed spectacles that gave him an owlish look. His medical category was B2 (fit), so he shouldn't have been on this trip, except that he was a very good operator and they were in short supply. Here he was, having been drafted for the Assault Group, with this mad corporal who evidently had a death wish by volunteering. But though he must have been absolutely terrified he stuck to his job and didn't ever give way to panic. So he was the hero.

The next day the snipers up on the ridge a quarter of a mile away became a nuisance. Fortunately for us they didn't have special sharpshooter rifles, but even then it was very disconcerting to hear the rounds rushing by you. The shelling became more intense. German artillerymen worked to a strict plan. They targeted harrying fire at crossroads on the basis of simple logic that they would have twice the chance of hitting any passing vehicles. When I took over the last batch of messages, having to dash between each salvo, the staff captain was arguing that we were all going to be blown away if we didn't move from the crossroads. As the frontline units were reduced well below strength his idea was to move Brigade HQ up to the frontline in the village above us. It was a sound idea but I shuddered at the prospect.

I was directed to put the Jeep in the backyard of a house on the outskirts of the village. We dug another slit trench by the side of the Jeep. We were within mortar range now. But fortunately one could hear these rounds coming and there was time to dive from the Jeep into the slit trench. Getting back into the operator's seat after one salvo I found powdered glass all over it. There was a jagged hole in the windscreen and another in the radio set, just in front of where my head would have been. The situation in the village was strange to say the least. We were at one end of the main street and the Germans at the other. In between, the French locals were sitting outside their Bistro sipping Calvados.

Further down the garden where the Jeep was, one could look out across the Orne Valley for two miles and see Pegasus bridge in the distance. I was taking in the view one day when a flight of Messerschmitts did a bombing run on the bridge. It was like watching the Aldershot Tattoo with the planes diving, letting go their bombs and swooping up for another run. One of the planes didn't swoop up, it did a sharp turn and came straight towards me. I had heard that the Germans would fire on just any one man that they saw. I was that one man. The pilot fired one cannon at me and a furrow of turf was thrown up in the field, coming towards me and the little 20mm shells exploded on the stone wall to my left. It happened in a flash and I had no time to move.

How the pilot missed I don't know. But I was rapidly using up my ration of lucky escapes.

Later on our artillery took up their position behind us and launched a bombardment of the German lines to support an attack by the 6th Airborne. They used shrapnel shells that exploded overhead and sent long streamers of shrapnel down on the Germans. But they were sheltering in buildings or had deep trenches and the shrapnel didn't effect them much. The Airborne troops attack was repulsed with heavy losses.

In the garden I chanced on a bloodstained green beret where one Commando had been killed. I asked one of their signals people why they didn't wear steel helmets. He told me the story of Lovat's previous Commando raids on a German radar station. They had taken eight German prisoners but when the boats came to take them off the beach there was no room for the prisoners. Lovat could not let them go after what they had seen of the Commando personnel, their equipment and tactics, so he ordered them shot. The sergeant who had to do it was still having nightmares. Of course the Germans found the bodies and guessed what had happened. When Hitler got the news he was in a terrible rage and ordered that no quarter was to be given to any Commando. Lovat bit the bullet and directed that all his men would wear their green berets so they could always be recognized. I am not repeating this story with any intention of denigrating an outstandingly brave officer, who led his men from the front and won their undying loyalty. I do it merely to illustrate the dreadful decisions that command must take in war, and why I would never have been fitted to be an officer. Lord Lovat continued to tour the frontline outposts in his Jeep, careless of his own safety, encouraging his men. Inevitably he was shot and wounded by a sniper.

A dreadful incident of 'friendly fire' took place about this time. A remnant of One Commando, forty strong, were lining a trench when a one ton 15 inch shell from Warspite fell short into the trench. There was only one survivor, one man left from a Commando numbering 550. It was really nobody's fault. Warspite's guns were badly worn and their range tables were no longer accurate.

After twelve days we were relieved by another radio crew. My Jeep looked like a colander, but it still worked. The new crew was a bit taken aback when they saw it. Driving back along the road to the bridge a few rounds came whistling by, but my luck held. Arriving back at our HQ, not far from Bayeux, we were given a radio van instead of the Jeep, these vans were commonly known as 'Gin Palaces'. We were then detailed off to join the 15th Scots Division.

ARNHEM

It seemed that the war might be all but over. But that was a big mistake. Montgomery thought he could make one final push into Germany that would end the war. What he didn't know was that his plan had been betrayed. Rumour has it that a German spy, pretending to be a Dutch Resistance co-ordinator at SHAPE got his hands on Monty's plan. The German staff were alerted and an armoured corps that had just been re-formed in Austria was despatched to Arnhem to block Monty's advance.

Likewise the bridge crossings of the Maas at Grave and the Rhine at Nijmegen were reinforced.

My signal detachment was now reinforced with an American Air Force captain and a driver. We were given a White Scout car (a U.S Army armoured car. It was not white in colour but named after the manufacturer, the White Motor Company) and a Jeep. This suggested there was a rough time ahead. Sure enough we were attached to the Guards Armoured Division. We watched the vast armada of aircraft flying overhead carrying the 1st Airborne, the 101st and 102 US Airborne Divisions. A huge artillery barrage broke up the German defences and we were off in a desperate race to get to Arnhem and thence into Germany through a weak spot in their defences, skirting Eindhoven and the Maas until we reached Grave. Here the US Airborne troops had suffered heavy losses taking the bridge by a river crossing in open boats under point blank fire from the further bank. Pressing onto Nijmegen the Guards found the U.S Airborne troops had suffered even greater losses trying to take the town. It is said the gutters ran with blood. The heavy resistance was completely unexpected. The Germans had anti tank guns at the bridge firing down the main street. As the Sherman tanks came around a bend into the street they were knocked out one by one. Finally, in desperation, the Guards lined up four tanks abreast so that they came around the bend together. One was knocked out but the rest silenced the German gun battery.

When the remnants of 1st Airborne were rescued from Arnhem my group were moved to a field regiment. We were still picking up stragglers from the U.S Airborne Divisions who had drifted off course in their parachute landings and had no idea where they were. The field regiment was busy laying down barrages wherever our TacR reports revealed juicy targets, such as German troop concentrations preparing to attack.

The gunners were in fact such a thorn in the side of the German Command that they paid us the ultimate accolade by targeting a V2 on us.

I was busy at the set in the scout car and had become inured to the continued barrage of the twenty five pounders. However there was suddenly a much more violent explosion that rocked the car. As I stepped out of the car I saw an enormous plume of smoke and dust rising two hundred feet high. It had only just missed the battery. As I watched a downpour of stones and dust advanced across the field towards me. I quickly dodged back into the scout car.

The field regiment suffered a calamity one day when their meat ration was condemned. Coincidentally news came that the 50th Lowland Division had captured a German food depot at Oss. My U.S captain was a wild guy, a man after my own heart. He and I just piled into an old Jeep and took off for the front line. Prisoners from the Herman Goering Regiment were coming in, looking pretty defiant. After dodging between armoured vehicles we eventually found the food depot and between us lifted the whole hindquarters of a cow off its hook and dumped it on the backseat of the Jeep. The cook back at the Field Regiment was delighted; we all dined on sirloin steaks that night.

The base of Nijmegen salient on the east side towards Venlo was being held by the 7th U.S Infantry Division, fresh over from the States and unused to the combat conditions they were likely to face in Holland. The German Intelligence immediately

pinpointed them as a weak spot in the line. They sent in fifty Tiger tanks with Panzer Grenadiers riding on them. It must have been a fearful sight for the U.S Infantry. Before they could bring their anti-tank guns to bear they were blasted to bits. The infantry bazookas just bounced off the diamond hard, slab armour of the Tigers. The Americans had no choice but to get the hell out of there. Our divisional ASSU detachment was sent to the 7th US Divisional HQ to provide them with air cover. They arrived just beyond Helmond to find themselves holding the front line. Fortunately for them the Germans couldn't believe their luck and halted their advance, fearing a trap. This allowed air support strikes to be laid on. Also our artillery got their range and started pounding them. The 50th Division on the other side of the salient had just captured Tilburg and were having a whale of a time celebrating in the streets with the Dutch inhabitants. The Jocks didn't take kindly to being summoned to remedy the situation on the opposite side of the salient. But they moved quickly and soon drove the Germans back to Venlo.

We were posted to 50th Div. To give them air support. I arranged one useful sortie on a village north of the Maas for the brigadier. Details of these air strikes had to be sent off in a special ETA code that was changed every few hours to avoid interception. In addition to describing the target and setting a time for the attack, one had to specify the exact map reference for the strike. This had to be marked additionally by the artillery who were asked to fire red smoke at it. It was also important to say in which direction the attack should take place. In this case the Typhoons came in to order, firing their rockets along the main street ahead of our troops.

The Germans were thoroughly rattled and the lads were able to capture the place with little loss.

Generally progress was slow however and we had to endure heavy shelling. Eventually Kleve and Goch were captured by the 2nd Army after a furious bombardment. It was said that only a few metres separated each shell hole. This left the way open for the crossing of the Rhine.

I was next summoned to relieve the Canadian ASSU who needed all their people for the seaborne attack on Rotterdam. Capture of this huge port would solve all our supply problems. We were stationed on the newly captured airfield at Tilburg. We had a tent on the airfield perimeter and were awoken each morning by the noise of the aircraft engines being started. The Typhoon engines were turned over by firing a gas cartridge and this made a dawn chorus of some magnitude, since several cartridges were usually needed to do the trick. We could also watch the V1s clattering across the sky on their way to Amsterdam. One of the pilots coming into land spotted a V1 below him. Although a Typhoon couldn't catch a V1 in level flight they could overtake them in a steep dive. The pilot did just that and shot the V1 down. He was not praised for his effort however, for the V1 did more damage where it landed. It was usual to let them go on to face the anti aircraft batteries nearer to Amsterdam. Their guns were supplied with proximity fused shells and had a good record of kills.

(Keith Wakelam continued with his division over the Rhine and into Germany. At this stage his operator was 'Taffy' a Welsh school teacher in his late thirties who had only been recently called up and was medical category B2. He had Diabetes and no medicine. He struggled on and whilst

constantly trying to maintain his sugar levels, continued to be a vital member of the team. On VE Day, Keith flew to Copenhagen on a DC3)

COPENHAGEN

As we flew north over Denmark the patterning of the fields was remarkable. The Danes tethered their cattle so they grazed the fields in overlapping arcs. When we reached Copenhagen it presented an amazing sight. Danish flags were flying from every building.

So we landed . A major general and his staff, one company of Airborne troops and us. Drawn up on the tarmac facing us were three thousand German infantry, fully armed. The general took the surrender. Any fear that the Germans might reconsider was swept away when the airfield was invaded by at least two hundred thousand Danes. We were surrounded and back slapped on all sides. We were backslapped all the way into the city and I finished up black and blue. We parked in the main square outside a posh hotel where we got rooms.

What a pleasure it was to sleep in a real bed complete with a duvet, something I had not seen before. There was no food rationing in Denmark, you could have what you liked. The Germans called the place 'Cream Cake'.

I was in Copenhagen for six weeks until normal communication was restored. During that time we made friends with Danish Resistance people and were shown the place of execution where over a hundred of their members were shot. We also saw the former Gestapo HQ that had been bombed by the RAF in response to a request by the Danes. Over forty members of the Resistance had been rounded up by the Germans and the Danes were frightened they would give way under torture and reveal vital information.

The front of the building was intact. The bombs had all gone off at the back and gutted the place. The prisoners were all kept on the top floor so none escaped. One bomb had gone over the building and hit the girl's school opposite. Forty girls were killed. The Danes accepted this awful calamity with resignation. War is hell.

When this bloody war is over
Oh how happy I shall be,
When I get my civvy clothes on
No more soldiering for me.

By the KING'S Order the name of R.B Wakelam, Royal Corp of Signals was published in the London Gazette on 22nd March 1945 as mentioned in a Despatch for distinguished service. I am charged to record His Majesty's high appreciation.

P.J Grigg
Secretary of State for War

How did you adapt to 'Civvy Street' after the war?
Not very well.

What did you do after the war in the following decades?
About 12 different jobs from Whitehall to Surrey University.

Do you think WWII veterans have had enough support from governments over the years?
I haven't had any.

Have you ever returned to the Netherlands. If so how did you find the Netherlands now?
Many times. Modern Netherlands is all built up now.

What do you think of the UK in 2009?
Good in parts.

Dear Mr Pringle

I read with interest your letter to the Campbeltown Courier. I was born and brought up on a very large farm, 17 miles from Campbeltown. In November 1939 I was 18 years old and you had to register at the local town office. They said "Oh, the war? It will only last two years!" So, I got on with various farm duties.

My father's daily newspaper was the Glasgow Herald, and in it I read an article about convoy drivers in the ATS. I immediately volunteered in Jan '42 and was called up in March. I did six weeks initial training at Cameron Barracks, Inverness (I could drive). Then onto a motor maintenance unit, near Camberley in Surrey (*the course lasted ten weeks and there was five tests, including night driving, plus Highway Code and vehicle maintenance tests. In 1945 Princess Elizabeth, later Queen Elizabeth II, put on her overalls as a subaltern and completed the course at Camberley passing out as a fully qualified driver, ending the war as a junior commander*). Eventually was posted to Burnham Beeches, a large forest near Slough, Bucks (*The land was requisitioned by the War Department in 1942 and played a major role in the marshalling of vehicles destined for the D-Day landings. ATS convoy drivers were heavily involved in moving thousands of vehicles down to the south coast. The vehicles had been waterproofed for the coastal invasion, so had to travel at 15mph so the engines did not heat too much and ruin the waterproofing. It was considered that women drivers would be more patient and would stick to such a low driving speed*). There were thousands of vehicles parked under the trees and we ATS had to go find them etc and the units who wanted them came and fetched them. I got fed up and wanted a bit more driving, so applied to go back to Scotland and was sent to Eglinton Castle, Irving in December '43. It was fantastic, we were out every week delivering allsorts of Army trucks (*ATS girls were trained to drive vehicles such as Bedford QL troop carriers and American Studebakers*) to the sea ports on the south coast of England, Newcastle Upon Tyne etc. On the 1st week of

June 1944 we were sent to Maidstone in Kent, a convoy of 4 ton Bedford trucks. We picked them up near a depot in Glasgow. On June 6th, D-Day we were in Trafalgar Square.

My brother was commissioned in the Royal West Kents (The Buffs) I met my husband at a staging camp in March '45 and we got married in June. He was in the Staffs Yeomanry and took all their horses to Palestine, Christmas 1939 and was there until Nov '44 (*On arrival they carried out mounted operations, to quell Arab and Jewish disturbances. In 1941 they converted to tanks and took part in the battle of El Alamein and later landed on Sword Beach as part of the Normandy landings.*)

Yours
Anne Wise

Dear Mr Pringle

I read your appeal in the Scunthorpe Telegraph and I am sending my thoughts on the subject you are researching. Please excuse the writing, as I am over 88 years old, and have arthritis. I joined the Royal Navy before WWII and served 12 years until 1951. I am appalled by the way this country has deteriorated in the last 15 years. First of all Mr Blair and his New Labour have taken us into two wars unnecessarily. The war in Iraq was first of all to destroy weapons of mass destruction, based on lies and cosying up to that villain Bush. Then it was to remove Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, which is against all United Nations policy. Then it was to bring democracy to the Iraqi people. Thousands of their people have been murdered in their name.

Then the NATO operation in Afghanistan, which British troops seem to be fighting to save us and the U.S from terrorism, as Mr Brown says in Parliament. Another thing - what about our elected government? It seems Brown brings many of his New Labour friends into power by making them Lords! - and the number of Baronesses holding office in government. The EU too is a disgrace. Blair promised a referendum, but left PM office when things were going wrong. Then Brown signs the Lisbon Treaty on our behalf - an example of New Labour democracy!

Finally, our country, for which the likes of me fought for freedom, now has the highest number of teenage pregnancies, abortions, knife crime, obesity and binge drinkers in Europe. People of my age are afraid to go out at night.

So, to sum it up, I didn't find it difficult to adjust, and found plenty of support from service organisations I belong to, and from the Government since I turned 80, and also from the Veterans Agency, but I am totally disillusioned with the way the country has been run into the ground since New Labour took over.

All my regards, Sincerely
Ernest Broome
Ex Petty Officer Stoker / Mechanic
Royal Navy

PS. In 1952 when I was working at a steelworks I saw a psychiatrist as I kept having nightmares due to war experiences. He said you should grow out of them as time went on. I still have them about twice a year!

Dear Nick

I signed on the SS Hetton on the 13th October 1939. The ship left the Tyne for Narvik, in Northern Norway. We loaded iron ore, the deadliest cargo any ship could carry. From Narvik we sailed to Bergen to join a convoy, our destination in the U.K was Workington, then in the county of Cumberland. About four days from Workington we ran out of food and had to live off corned meat only until we reached port!

I volunteered to join a scheme called the stand by pool. It's purpose was to ensure no ship left the port undermanned, so I, along with others, had our bags packed ready to join any ship which was short handed at a minutes notice. The first ship was SS Westcove which I signed on the 6th January and was paid off on the 18th January 1940. It may make you think that was a short voyage, but I had to take the ship to its' first port of call then return home. The next ship from the pool was SS Fulham II. I signed off on her on the 27th January 1940 and was paid off on the 29th June that year. One voyage on this ship sticks in my mind vividly!

We were heading north in convoy bound for Leith, before entering the Firth of Forth the signal was sent to all ships in the convoy to form a single line. Our master Captain Smedley asked permission to proceed independently, but the commodore sent a message saying "Sir you are still in convoy follow me." We took position behind the commodore's ship SS Royal Archer, about half an hour later the Royal Archer struck a sea mine and began to sink stern first! An escort destroyer NO. L41 attached a line to the ill fated ship to try to tow her to safety, but it was too much to do so the tow line had to be cut and the Royal Archer sank.

My next ship was the SS Fellside, the master, Captain Nelson (now there's a good captains name!) We sailed from Middlesbrough to Loch Ewe on the west coast of Scotland to join an Atlantic convoy. The Fellside was an old ship and would not have left port in peace time, but it was said many times "THERE'S A WAR ON!" We lost the convoy and had to proceed on our own. At 9.40a.m. On 17th July 1940 the Fellside hit a torpedo and sank with the loss of 12 men out of a crew of 32. I was helmsman at the time the torpedo hit us, I ran to the boat deck and with the help of two crew members we lowered the portside lifeboat. I then ran to the after deck to assist the naval gunner release the life raft, hanging from the side of the main mast. We couldn't do so, then the gunner said to me "come on Geordie it is time we were away from here!"

We both stood on the ships side as she was sinking fast, then jumped overboard. I swam to a life raft climbed aboard and put my jacket on an oar so as to be seen better. I was the last of twenty survivors to be picked up by the lifeboat. I had previously helped to release! We sighted a ship about 8 p.m. The ship came to us and took us on board. On the rescue ship's side in large letters was the name Panamainian,

Panama. We later found out its real name was SS President Fillmore. The Americans were not in the war at the time so they used the name Panamanian to protect their neutrality. The crew of the Panamanian told us about the cargo the ship was carrying, it had everything that was needed for a country at war. We arrived in Liverpool on Saturday 20th July 1940. We were taken to the sailor's home in Lime Street, where we were kitted out with clothes. I think the suits were made from potato bag tweed! The next day, we were given a rail ticket and some money for us to get home. We left Liverpool and arrived at Huddersfield station at noon. There were five of us from South Shields travelling together and we made our way to the forces canteen, which was only open for members of H.M. Forces. We sat down at a table, a man came over and said civilians were not served in the canteen. I informed him that we were merchant seaman going home on survivors leave. The man who we later found to be the manager, told us to stay where we were and that we could have anything that was on the menu. An army officer asked the manager who we were, the manager told him we were merchant navy survivors going home and that some soldiers, sailors and airmen in the canteen wanted me to throw these men out. The officer was furious and shouted to them "You lot, if you have not heard of the Merchant Navy before now, you will have heard of them and be glad you have, before this war is over!" He said he would pay our bill, but the manager said, "No thanks sir, this bills on me." Before the officer left the canteen he shook us all by the hand and wished us all the best for the future. Three naval ratings came over to the table and one said "Sorry Geordie, we didn't know." and off they went.

My next ship was M/V Weirbank, master, Captain Lewis. We left Hartlepool for Montreal Canada, and after loading 10,000 tons of grain, we sailed for Halifax Nova Scotia. On arrival at Halifax our captain was ordered to join the convoy just leaving. Our captain asked permission to put his wife ashore, as she was living in Canada. The naval officer in charge gave him permission and told him to join the next convoy. The convoy we missed was the ill-fated Jarvis Bay convoy. The 'Jarvis Bay', an armed merchant liner was sighted by a German battleship, who attacked and sank her. The captain of the Jarvis Bay, to save as many lives in the convoy as possible, steamed towards the enemy battleship knowing he had no chance of survival, took everything the enemy fired at her, till she sank with a heavy loss of lives. By his deeds many ships in the convoy were saved.

We lost our convoy on the 14th November 1940, along with a Norwegian ship. I was crow's nest look out man. I climbed to the top of the mast, stood on the yard arm and scanned the horizon. The convoy was right behind us. An escort destroyer came up to us and hailed both ships with the message 'Welcome back into the fold'. We arrived in Cardiff on the 16th December 1940 and paid off. After Christmas and New Year at home, I signed on the SS King. I made two voyages on her, both to the same place, Cuba, in the West Indies to load sugar. Nothing much happened on these voyages and I was paid off in Liverpool on the 21st June, 1941.

My next ship was the SS Hopestar, I signed on 22nd July. 1941. We left the Tyne for Sunderland, and we loaded among other war supplies about 6,000 tons of ammunition. Then we sailed to Glasgow on the Clyde, to take on board an invasion

craft. The craft was too big in one piece so it had to be cut into three sections. We sailed from the Clyde heading southwards about three days from Freetown. A fire was discovered in the ships coalbunkers. We headed full speed to Freetown where the fire was put out. (thank God.) We left Freetown and headed for Cape Town, where we picked up mail for South African soldiers in the Middle East, coal and provisions. We then arrived in Alexandria, Egypt and discharged all our cargo. Whilst there I saw HMS Baram sail out on her last voyage (she was blown up shelling enemy forces off Tobruk, North Africa.) We then sailed for Jaffa, Palestine (now part of Tel Aviv, Israel). We loaded hay for Beirut.

At Beirut, on Christmas Eve morning, a French tanker SS Phoenix was leaving port fully laden when suddenly there was a loud explosion. The Phoenix had blown up setting fire to the whole harbour. I was night watchman at the time and was asleep in my cabin. One of my crew mates Jimmy Williams dashed into my cabin, threw my life jacket to me and yelled "Tommy the whole place is on fire, get yourself ashore" I grabbed my life jacket, ran on deck, saw the inferno and, without hesitation, jumped overboard! I landed in a barge, half laden with hay, just as it was being pulled away to safety. I was put up in the British sailors society mission where I spent Christmas 1941 with only the clothes I was wearing and my life jacket.

We left Beirut for Mauritius, a small island in the Indian Ocean. We loaded a full cargo of sugar (about 12,000 tons). To show their hospitality to the brave men of Britain's Merchant Navy, the hierarchy of Port Louis, the island's capital, took a bus load of the crew on a trip around the island. (If it had been peace time the same lot would have ignored us!) The bus tour turned out a huge success. We headed up this small mountain, too big to be called a hill, but it was too much for the old bus. We all got out and pushed the bus to the top, part of the bus's engine had to be water cooled, but we had no water! So instead we used lemonade, which did the trick! I can still remember the beautiful panoramic view of Port Louis.

We left Mauritius for Cape Town, to pick up stores and fuel, from there to Durban. Once there we took on extra fuel for the voyage to the UK, we headed north to Freetown. We left Freetown in convoy and headed home. About five days from the UK we encountered many difficulties on our journey. The worst encounter came when we could not keep up with the convoy, so the captain of the escorting destroyers signaled our Captain to go it alone. We were not alone SS Baron Haig was also having the same trouble. But help was at hand, out of the sky came a guardian angel in the shape of a Sunderland flying boat. The Sunderland rendezvoused with both ships circling around us till nightfall and it repeated this manoeuvre each day till we sighted Lands End. Our captain sent a thank you message to the crew of the Sunderland. The captain of our guardian angel replied by flying over each ship flapping his plane wings, and then he flew out into the Atlantic Ocean. Hoping, I believe, to do the same again for his brothers in arms, the Merchant Navy.

We had orders to go to Loch Ewe, the place we left the UK from. After leaving there we had to make London our next port of call. We had to sail through the infamous E Boat Alley, nicknamed the ships graveyard! We arrived in port in the east end of London and were paid off on the 23rd April 1942. Sometime after leaving the

'Hopestar', I thought what a lucky ship she had been. To survive a fire in her coal storage bunkers, whilst carrying thousands of tons of ammunition. Escaping from a blazing inferno in Beirut harbour, encountered very stormy weather, abandoned by escort vessels and then protected by a Sunderland flying boat! To top it all to reach her final port of call she had to sail through the most treacherous seaway off the British Isles, namely E Boat Alley! Unfortunately, the Hopestar's luck did not hold. Some time after the war ended she signed on a full crew in South Shields' shipping office, sailed from the Tyne and was never seen or heard of again!

From April to July 1942 I worked ashore fire-watching on ships that had no crews, as they were in dock having repairs. I signed on the SS Anticosti, a Canadian lake boat, on the 30th July 1942. When I told my mother I was going on the coast, meaning travelling between the Tyne and Thames, and I would have to do my own cooking, she bought me lots of tinned food. She instructed me to have a meal in London and that there would be a meal for me when I returned home! This happened a few times, but I learnt how to cook, so not only did it please me but also my mother.

The Anticosti was a very slow ship. We were heading towards the Tyne, when a signal went out to all ships, "If you can do ten knots or more you may leave the convoy!" This order was always welcomed by the coastal seamen, as it meant they could get home earlier. We left the convoy to take advantage of the order, an escort vessel came alongside us. The captain of the escort asked what speed were we doing? Our master, Captain Woods, replied "Eleven knots". The escort captain replied, "I am doing six knots and I am passing you, get back in the convoy!" What I liked about the Anticosti, she was a happy go lucky ship, with the emphasis on lucky! We were sailing through E Boat Alley one night when we were attacked by enemy E Boats! The ship ahead of us, SS Lysland, was torpedoed and sank. The ship in the column next to us, SS George Balfor, was hit by a torpedo but did not sink, although badly damaged.

I am by nature a bit of a hoarder, any tinned food I did not use I put in the draw under my bunk. After ten months there was quite a hoard. A very long time after leaving the Anticosti, I was walking along King Street in South Shields, when a man, who I did not know, came up to me and asked if my name was Tommy Sanderson and did I ever sail on a ship called the Anticosti? I said yes to both questions. He then told me a very interesting story. It appeared the Anticosti could not make head way and was stopped in the same position for about seven days. All on board her had run out of food days before. As if by a miracle the seaman who occupied the cabin I had used had the fright of his life, when for no reason whatever, the draw under his bunk shot out and revealed a hoard of tins of food.! The captain, Woods, was called and he confiscated all the food, giving orders to the cook that all the crew had the same rations. The captain called all the crew together and told them if anyone met Tommy Sanderson to thank him and shake his hand!

I was paid off on the 28th May 1943. I fell in love with a lovely girl called Esther Shawyer. We both worked in 'Fyfes' fish shop. I courted her for sometime then asked her to marry me. She said yes, and we married on the 25th August 1943. I heard of a small tanker, owned by the Esso company, plying between the Tyne and Grangemouth, in Scotland. I signed on her, the SS Tioga, on the 17th June 1943. On the 17th September

1943 at 8 o'clock in the evening, I, along with my shipmate Paddy, came off watch and had a cup of tea. Then Paddy said he was going to have a word with a friend in another cabin. I tried to stop him as there was something in my mind telling me to stop him! I couldn't, so I went to my bunk to go to sleep and I felt very lonely.

We arrived in the Tyne at six the next morning, on the 18th September. I was given leave and told to report back to the ship at 6 o'clock that evening. I walked from Jarrow to Westoe and as I walked I sang, (something I would not normally do, being superstitious and believing 'a song before breakfast meant you would cry before supper.) I sang to myself all the way home. My wife and I were staying with my mother in law, till the house we were preparing to move into was ready. I arrived home and my wife's aunt answered the door to my knock. She was quite distressed in appearance and told me to come in. She put her arms around me and told me Cissy, my wife, died at 8 o'clock the previous evening. To say I was devastated, was putting it mildly! It took me quite a while to get back to normal.

I signed on the SS Parkwood on the 30th October 1943, we left the Tyne for Portsmouth, going through the straits of Dover. We were shelled by the big guns on the French coast, luckily we were not hit, but it was not a nice position to be in, shells the size of dustbins flying overhead are to say the least terrifying.

The next three ships I signed on were all from the stand by pool. The first SS Fulham VII was comparatively new, I stayed on her from 15th January 1944 to 28th August 1944. On one voyage on the Fulham VII we were heading up the English Channel, bound for London. This was at night when an invasion craft collided with us. It tore away our portside lifeboat, davits, boatfalls, damaged all the bulwarks tore away the portside light, no one was hurt thankfully. Our master, Captain Jarratt was livid. He could not understand the actions of the Admiralty, allowing a convoy to head south right in the path of a convoy heading east. Captain Jarratt soon got over his anger as when we arrived in London he learnt he had been awarded the MBE.

The last ship I signed on in wartime was the SS Saintfield, The war was nearly at an end by now, but all was not safe. We were heading for the Tyne one afternoon and just off Flamborough Head, on the east coast of Yorkshire, a heavy mist formed over the ship. All of a sudden we heard gun fire and heard shells passing over the ship. Our captain grabbed the wire to sound the ships siren and held on till his arm ached. Some how the mist disappeared and on our starboard bow was the cruiser HMS Orion having gunnery practice. We received a message of apology from the commander of HMS Orion, we replied then headed for the Tyne.

Well, this is my story of my bit I did in the war!

Thomas Reed Sanderson

What are your views of the UK today?

I'm 90 years old, so I don't think my views will mean anything.

Dear Nick

Yes, I decided to join the Royal Navy as a 17 year old lad, to as they say 'do ones bit to help Great Britain'. Firstly my opinion of the UK is that, as we are finding out the whole government are crooks and life since 1946?

Towards the end of the European clash I was told to pick up at Leith - HMS Black Swan (*The ship had an eventful war. In 1940 it was bombed off the Norwegian coast by a German plane. After repairs, it was hit by a mine whilst on East Coast convoys. Again it survived but required more repairs. In 1942 it took part in Operation Torch and in 1943 along with HMS Stonecrop in Convoy OS 45 it sunk one of the most lethally successful U-boats, U-124) to sail to the Pacific, where the war with Japan continued. Having been trained in oil and steam the Royal Navy had previously drafted me to a coal fired ship, the Aldburg. Typical of the Lords of the Admiralty. The Black Swan finally arrived in the Pacific. (Black Swan on active duty went right down to Australia and the Philippine Islands.) Life went on until me and two others got covered in oil leaks (warm) which required us on arrival in Shanghai to be whipped off to hospital, where we were treated by Chinese nurses, each for four hours. Remember Penicillin was not invented until 1942, and nobody knew what effects it could cause. Thank God the war ended and the British Red Cross arrived. The chief doctor was amazed and took over at once and stopped the Penicillin. (*The first British soldier to be treated with Penicillin was at the 98th British General Hospital, Chateaudun. He had gas gangrene in his wound and would have certainly died. The trial worked and he recovered. Winston Churchill was treated with Penicillin in 1944 in Marrakesh, after suffering from a chest infection. The remaining Penicillin from his treatment was urgently sent to Delhi and was used to treat a dangerously ill RAMC physician. Brigadier Marriott had developed Septicaemia after a hernia operation and the injections of Penicillin saved his life.*) I and another chap were sent on board the hospital ship, Empire Clyde for a while, then eventually to HMS Reaper, an old aircraft carrier being used as a hospital ship and picked up POW's held in Singapore by the Japs. My main complaint was the fact that, as always, the officers had proper beds and nursing help, proper showers. The long trip home finally brought us to Gosport and Hasler Hospital.*

When I went to sign on the dole after the war, guess what they suggested. Yes, an oil fired tug job on the Thames, which I was forced to take, but of course had to see a civic doctor. I then worked for a bank, then went to leather college. (*Doug continued the family leather business dating back to 1750 and continues to make high quality leather products for yachts, classic cars, and belts etc.*)

Good Luck
Douglas Baggott

Dear Mr Pringle

I have read your letter in the St Helens Reporter and feel I must reply to it on behalf of my husband, who sadly died on 4th July 2008 aged 88 years. He was Thomas

Parton born 16th June 1920 and joined the Seaforth Highlanders in June 1939 as a regular soldier. He was POW 380 for 5 years. His experiences speak for themselves.

FRANCE 1940

I was a soldier in the Seaforth Highlanders, part of the 51st Highland Division. We arrived in France early in January 1940, disembarking at Le Havre. We moved up the front line to a place called Hombourg-Budance in front of the Maginot Line. When my section moved through to the front line I asked a French soldier what the front line was like, to which he replied "Tres bonne, tres bonne! If you do not fire at them they do not fire at you." We soon rectified that by sending fighting patrols out at night. Then my section was told to occupy a house in no man's land but were told not to fire on the enemy, just to observe where their positions were. From the upstairs window we could see the German positions and we duly reported back to our mortar and artillery who dealt with them.

After several nights the Germans realised they were being observed and sent a patrol to try and move us. The first we knew about it was when the German patrol tried to kick the door down shouting in perfect English "Come out and fight Tommy!" They always called us Tommies, but the French had really reinforced the house. We responded by throwing hand grenades at them from the upstairs windows. We heard the cries of the wounded and by inspecting pools of blood the next morning we knew that our throwing had been successful. In those early days the enemy always carried the wounded and dead back to their own lines. It did not deter them and they came back several nights afterwards, but they kept out of range of our hand grenades. We were limited as to how far we could throw them because the upstairs windows had been blocked up. It was then they realised the Jocks were in the line!

The Germans then attacked through Holland and Belgium, so we withdrew behind the Maginot Line and then travelled by train till we reached Rouen in Northern France. We stayed there a few days while we re armed, then we boarded buses to get closer to the front line. After we had been travelling about two hours we had problems because of the refugees. There were some in cars, horse and carts, even wheelbarrows. It was so sad to see old people and small children trying to get away from the war. Eventually we pressed on until we came to a full stop. There had been an air raid and the German Air Force had machine gunned the refugees. How could they mistake refugees for troops? We did our best for the wounded. The most tragic sight for me was a young mother who pushed her pram with a child in, into a ditch then thrown herself across it to protect the child, but both were dead.

Anyone who has served in the front line knows fear and anyone who says he has not is a liar. You have to be master of yourself so you can do your duty for your comrades. Also in the front line there are not any atheists. At least I never saw one. It was while I was serving in the front line that I realised that if I heard the sound of a bullet, I knew it had missed me.

Eventually, we were taken out of the line to prepare for an attack against the German bridgehead over the Somme. The plan of attack was that the divisional artillery

would open fire at 3.20 a.m for 20 minutes in a rolling barrage, followed by the French tanks of Groupment De Gaulle, supposedly 10 Highlanders behind every tank. But as Robbie Burns, the Scottish poet said 'The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft awa'. The plan was good, but the execution non existent. My company, which was leading the attack, lay at the start line with fixed bayonets 600 yards in front of a track from the Route National to Boencourt waiting for the tanks to arrive. They were over half an hour late. The rolling artillery barrage had finished and only three tanks turned up.

Our objective was Mount Caubert but the attack still went on. The tank with us got stuck in a shell hole. The Germans who had withdrawn a small way back to avoid the artillery barrage because of the delay were now back in their original position, waiting for us as we charged up that hill. The company commander sent his tank across to us to give protection against the machine guns. That got knocked out, but we still carried on, charging with fixed bayonets, hoping to get close enough to the enemy to use them.

It was a disaster, it was sheer slaughter. B company was literally wiped out. I have never seen courage like it, as the Seaforths charged up that hill without any support what ever. What remained of us got to about 20 to 25 metres from the enemy front line when we were brought to a halt by the heavy machine gun fire. Then their snipers had a field day with what was left of us.

When you see war films on TV you do not hear the cries of the wounded and dying. It takes very little effort on my part to recall the cries and the screaming of the dying and wounded. I was surrounded by death and destruction. The least movement by the wounded and the snipers and machine guns would open fire again. My comrade next to me was hit several times. I told him that when it got dark I would try to get him back to our own lines, but when it got dark I found he was too badly wounded to be moved, so I stayed with him until he died. All through that day and night I could hear the wounded French soldier crying for water. My comrade, Tommy Stoddart, died in the early hours of the morning and I realised then that I was the only one left alive.

(Thomas Stoddart was from Edinburgh and was killed on the 4th June, 1940 aged 21 years old. As the rearguard fought, thousands of British soldiers were being evacuated from the Dunkirk. He has no known grave but is remembered on column 126 of the Dunkirk Memorial.)

It was on that battlefield that I found the power of prayer. I fully expected to get killed, so I prayed for courage that if I was going to die then grant me the strength to die like a soldier. I also prayed for my widowed mother and my eleven brothers and sisters back in England. After praying I had a feeling of a presence. I cannot understand it. I have spoken about it on numerous occasions since the war. I am still bewildered by it. As I got out of that tight situation I can only conclude that the Good Lord heard my prayers.

Now came the problem of getting back to my own lines. I decided to leave my rifle there, as it would only be a handicap if I had any crawling, so I took hand grenades and set off back down the hill. I had not gone far when dawn broke and the snipers opened fire again. I had already crawled past two of the enemy, but when the bullets started kicking up the dust round my feet I moved more quickly. I could see a shell hole in front of me and I am more or less certain that I broke the Olympic long jump record

that day! I took a run and jump and landed straight in this shell hole, but who did I find in this hole, but the poor wounded French soldier who had been crying for water for the last twenty four hours. I gave him my water bottle and he was very grateful.

Eventually, in my efforts to get back to my own lines I was taken prisoner. On being questioned by a German officer I asked if I could have a drink of water (I had left my water bottle with the French soldier). He said I could if I had anything to drink out of. On taking my mess tin from my small pack he said, "That's not much good". There were four holes in it. Two bullets had passed straight through it. On closer inspection they found that seven bullets had passed through my clothing and equipment and one had nicked me at the back of my right knee.

POW

I was a POW for five years. My POW number was 380 Stalag IXC. I think the Komando from which I escaped was 207. It was a stone quarry. I was sentenced to a punishment camp on top of a mountain near a town called Romild, which was another stone quarry, so it was not any punishment really. From previous experience I was an expert at breaking large pieces of stone. I was able to instruct my comrades how to swing the eighteen pound hammer to break the rocks.

The German custom when they thought you had done your punishment was to transfer you to different Komandos, two here, half a dozen somewhere else, then they realised what they were doing. Putting bad apples amongst the good ones and the bad ones influenced the good ones to escape. We escapees counted it a successful escape if we were out for 48 hours or more, because of the number of enemy we tied down looking for us.

The authority, in their wisdom, decided the best plan was to put us all in the same camp. We arrived there to find it had been a Russian camp. All windows and doors were sealed, as it was being fumigated to kill off all the vermin. We were told we would have to sleep on the floor of the washroom until our quarters were cleaned up. As we lined up outside the camp, a little, arrogant camp kommandant came out and started yelling "Escapees are you? Well let me tell you I have been in charge of all types of POWs and not one man has escaped from me!" If he had only known that a few hours later he would have between 30 and 40 POWs missing!

Eventually we were allowed into the compound after being searched. There were extra guards and more barbed wire put up. Later we were locked up in the wash place. When it got dark a little lad from Glasgow asked who wanted to escape. All the POWs put up their hand. The lad was surprised as he thought there would only be a few, as we had only just come out of a punishment camp. It was then decided to put all our names in a hat. The prisoner who could pick the lock and the one who knew where the wire had been cut would be first to go. The rest would follow at one minute intervals, as their names came out of the hat. This would teach the that commander a lesson. Everything was going according to plan when we heard rifle shots. Those left lay down on the tiles in their blankets to await what we knew would come. The onslaught from the guards. It came, crash, bang, wallop. We were lined up in fives to be

counted. Even today I can see that commandant's face when he saw how many were missing. First it went grey and his jaw was going up and down. Then a loud scream came out and he went berserk. Needless to say on an escape like that, all except two were caught in a couple of days. I am led to believe that two finally made it to Yugoslavia. The camp commandant was immediately removed.

A few days later a general in full uniform came to give us a lecture. He said "You think it is your duty to escape. Well we think it is our duty to stop you and if necessary to shoot you." He could not put us back in the Straffe camp, as the punishment camp was called, so when we had finished our shift in the salt mines we had to do extra work on preparing the roads. Prior to the mass escape by the RAF, it was probably the largest escape attempted. It achieved its objective by getting rid of an arrogant commander.

At the salt mine I was taken ill with a salt rash which broke out all over my face and in my ears. I was transferred to a POW hospital Obermasfeld. When I was better I was sent to another salt mine from which I again got away for a couple of days. When recaptured I was sent to a base camp at a place called Mulhausen. One day, on parade after the morning count I was called to the front and charged with escaping. The German interpreter announced that I had been awarded 28 days solitary confinement on bread and water, though the average was 14 or 21 days. At that time though the war was not going in the Germans favour. I was marched down to the cell and duly served my time with nothing to do and nothing to read. I thought it was a funny sort of 'award' as the interpreter had called it. When I came up the steps from what was literally a dungeon I was met by our senior NCO who said "Good God Tommy, what have they done to you?" It appears I was a walking skeleton. He took me straight to where the Red Cross parcels were stored and obtained a full one and said "Eat that and get some weight back on." I sat in the sun each day and recuperated with the aid of the Red Cross parcel.

As I sat in the sun, I noticed a POW who sat by the gates of the camp every day. In a camp of this size there was always two entrance gates. The guards always opened the first and locked it before opening the second. On speaking to the lad it appeared that he had received what we called a 'Johnny's letter'. His wife had met some American and was having a good time back home. He was devastated. He told me he sat there because one day a guard was going to get careless and leave the gates open instead of locking the first one, and he would be away. This was a suicidal escape as the guards would see him go. Lo and behold he was proved right, a guard did get careless and he was away. Shots were fired and the guards gave chase. We were all told to get on parade for a count to see if anyone else had got away. While we were on parade they brought him back. He had been caught not far from the camp. What a sorry state he was in. He had lost a shoe, through having to hold his trousers up. From the waist up he was naked and his body was covered in blood. The commandant was gloating and saying "This man has had a blood bath for trying to escape and anyone else who tries will get a blood bath too." He had been beaten by the guards using their rifle butts. Eventually he was taken to a POW hospital where, so I was told, he committed suicide by jumping from the top of a spiral staircase.

As in life, so in a POW camp. You win some and loose some.

Thomas Parton
Ex Seaforth Highlander

As for my own experiences I joined the WAAF in August 1940. I reported to West Drayton and remember having to run for the shelter and being shot at by enemy aircraft. Fortunately they missed me. I did my basic training at Cranwell and was placed in the Signal's Section. I had trained as a shorthand typist and my typing speed was very fast.

My first posting was to the Air Ministry in Harrogate, but this did not satisfy me. I wanted to be on a station. I managed to get an exchange posting with a girl at Rudloe Manor, outside Bath, who wanted to be nearer home. That was accomplished by 'talking' to other operators while on night duty. The nights were long with little to do, so it was one way of keeping awake. After that I was posted to various stations ending up in Lincoln. Life was very flat after I was discharged. Food was strictly rationed but there was points which enabled you to buy off the ration goods, if you could get them. Bread was a special mixture and not particularly enjoyable. I must admit we were all a lot healthier. As you can imagine there was a flourishing black market for those who could afford it. We couldn't.

Thomas was discharged from the Army in 1946. He had intended to make the army his life's career but as he was downgraded to C3 after years in captivity, and the Seaforths, as a fighting force demanded a grading of A1 he opted to leave the army at the end of his time. We married in March 1948 and after 60 years of happy marriage he died. He had been an insulin dependant diabetic for 50 years, working in a foundry handling molten metal until he retired at the age of 68. He never lost a days work through his diabetes which shows what kind of man he was. There was never a better one. He was a committed Christian, not just paying lip service, and a loving husband and father. It goes without saying how much I miss him.

As for his opinion of the country as it has been since 1946 it was not much. He strongly disapproved of much that is going on, lack of discipline, unruly behaviour which is not checked and a weak government which does not know what it is doing half the time. He said many times that he would not fight for it again today. He felt he had given so many years of his life for nothing.

My best wishes,
Doris Parton

Dear Sir

Ref, your letter in the Evening News. I retired from the RAF in 1950 with the rank of flying officer, having flown with Bomber Command during the war as a flight engineer. Like many others, I found life was a struggle, with no support. However, with

optimism I looked forward with much hope. I found it comparatively easy to obtain employment.

I have to say that 2009 is very disappointing, in fact everything is going backwards. I have saved all my life and now find that it seemed pointless. I have to say that I think our country is in the hands of a poor bunch of politicians. I remember hearing a MP saying "we don't do it for the money" and I wondered who he thought he was kidding. Bearing this in mind, I remember that I was awarded an increase of 25 pence on my retirement pension when I reached 80.

Going back 64 years, the most significant event was the political decision to eliminate the record of Bomber Command, in which over 55,000 aircrew lost their lives. I think my friends who died would be wondering WHY? But you have to remember that aviation was progressing very quickly just before the war, a very exciting time for a young man. As a schoolboy I used to cycle to Leconfield to watch the flying and naturally when war came flying was the thing.

Wartime was very exciting. I suppose the hazard of flying contributed to this. I served with the Canadians in No 6 Group of Bomber Command and on returning from Chemnitz (*Located in Saxony, in the east of Germany, the city had an important oil refinery, military hardware factories and a Flossenburg sub forced labour camp with 500 female inmates. The city suffered three major Allied raids. The first on the 14th/15th February 1945 was carried out by 717 RAF bombers, due to clouds, a lot of the bombs landed in the surrounding countryside. The next major raid was by the USAAF which attacked railway marshalling yards. On the 5th March 1945, the city was attacked by 760 RAF bombers and heavy damage was inflicted. At the end of the war it was in the Soviet sector and became part of communist East Germany. The city was renamed Karl Marx Stadt and remained so until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.*) we had to make a wheels up landing near High Wycombe, close to HQ Bomber Command. We were taken to HQ where we were interviewed by ACM Sir Arthur Harris, whom we held in very high esteem.

However, if the circumstances arose again I would do the same.

Yours Faithfully
R.O Scott
Born 1924

Dear Mr Pringle

In answer to your letter requesting thoughts from Bomber Boys of World War II, I write briefly to give you my thoughts of how the country has gone down the pan since.

I was one of the lucky 56% of Bomber Boys to live through the war. The Bomber Boys took a heavier toll than the Army and Navy. The Lancaster was a superb bomber of its day. Likewise, the Dakota which I flew in the Far East. I became an instructor and finished my service years at Farnborough on the 3 V Bombers. (*Valiant, Victor and Vulcan were the three types of plane that were part of strategic nuclear strike force, to be used, if*

required, against the Soviet Union during the Cold War era, in the decades after WWII ended.)

Our MP in the war was a personal friend. He was of the old sort who was giving back to his country something without being paid! We were taught properly at school. Our old solicitor (dead now) told me in the 70's "There are too many liars now" How true! The present society is full of litigation and stifled by bureaucracy, form filling, health and safety regulations and computers. The country no longer produces things the world needs. The country is no longer full of British 'English' people who all speak English!

I'm in my high 80s with a wife 5 year behind me and two wonderful children. Life has been full of sorrows and joys and I am more than lucky to have lived this long.

Yours Sincerely
Name withheld

What were you doing before war broke out. Where were you brought up etc?

I was at Bradfield public school. Was always interested in flying since early 30s. - Sir Alan Cobham, air aviator (1894-1973. *Flew in Royal Flying Corp during WW1 and became a pioneering aviator. In 1926 he flew from Britain to Australia, where 60,000 people greeted him at Melbourne airport. He set up a flying circus that toured Britain, bringing the wonders of aviation to the masses, and which also enabled people to go on short flights to experience this new thrilling way to travel.*) Caught the flying bug - Nothing like being paid to fly and not paying!

What are your most vivid memories of operations, specific flights, what you saw etc?

Getting my U.S Navy Gold Wings on my 21st birthday. A great parade. Half my Lancaster ops were day and half night. You saw too much in daylight. A leading Lancaster dropping bombs and one knocked the front off a Lancaster below - bomb aimer went down without his parachute! Being no. 3 bombing a marshalling railway yard south of Brussels and we all got pasted. My navigator wanted me to break off , but I thought we would then get all the flak boys attention!

On a night raid an F.W 190 flew right under my side, and left us alone. Only when away from target in dark sky TEC informed us we had the tail light 'on' - probably the reason Jerry left us alone - Lucky!? I lost ½ dozen seasoned pilots at end of my tour - sadly luck did not go with them on their own. One was my no. 2. In early Nov 44, bomb doors opened nearing up to target, plane just disappeared, (flesh, metal, the lot) only the propeller blade flopped down to earth.

What are you memories of your time in the Far East flying a Dakota?

238 Squadron - Going into a 'down' in air currents over the Arakan mountains whose strength was 100 mph! The stench of gangrene wounds of captured Japs being brought out of Burma back to India. Taking General Bill Slim (1891 -1970, *Led the 14th Army, the 'Forgotten Army' that fought in Burma. In WWI as a young British officer, he had fought alongside Anzac troops at Gallipoli. After WWII he was made a Viscount and in the '50s was the 13th Governor General of Australia*), 3 ADC, a nurse and his Jeep to Rangoon to review his

victorious troops (having a DFC probably selected me). He sat as no.2 in the cockpit with me. Being the 12th June 45, monsoon weather made it hard to find the airfield - more details on the general's map than our navigator!!! With 300 to 500 yards visibility we got him down. Then some time, 525 sqn on a scheduled service between Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, Saipan and Hong Kong.

Did you lose any mates in Bomber Command?

'Teddy' Edward Fletcher eldest of three sons of one of our estate employees. Joined the A.T.C with me and we used to go to navigation classes in Blackburn together. He was not in my squadron but in a crew lost near Stuttgart, all killed. His name is on the memorial tablet in our church at Ribchester. (*Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, 153 Squadron. Died on the 28th January 1945 aged 21 and is buried in Durnbach War Cemetery, Bayern, Germany*)

How do you think bomber crew managed to cope with such bad odds of surviving and how did you overcome fear?

As one of the 56% of survivors, prayed to God before every raid. As our plane was a poor climber, usually bombed at 18 to 18,500 ft so flying through the 'window' dropped by the boys above. Cunning old Grouse technique!

Dear Mr Pringle

A wee response to your request in the Stirling Observer. I will be 86 in July and I'm grateful I can still drive, work in my garden and walk (so pleasurable). I joined the ATS in 1941 when I was 17 ½, working first as a shorthand typist in the HQ of a heavy AA regiment and when the regiment went overseas, in the Brigade HQ. We were actually very well looked after, and it was interesting to me, to meet such a social mix.

In 1943, when I was on leave, 26 ATS were killed by an aircraft which came in very low, below the radar, on the seafront at Great Yarmouth. Later that year I went to OCTU at Windsor & was stationed after that around London, with the 93rd Searchlight Regt, manned by women. So I was there at the time of the buzz bombs, and the peace celebrations. I finished up on Hayling Island doing admin.

Demobbed Jan 1946, married June 1946. Had four daughters and a son. My husband died in 1961 when the children were 3 to 12. Before the children, I was secretary to the Professor of Anatomy at Glasgow for two years. I went to university myself in 1967, at the same time as my eldest daughter. I then lectured in Economics until 1981. Oh, I remarried in 1970. He died in 1997 aged 91.

About post war life. Many things are good. Despite the conventional wisdom I think the elderly I know are well cared for by the health service and that the pension is adequate - but of course I have a small private pension which makes all the difference. It's wonderful to travel anywhere in Scotland free by bus. I also think that families are caring and that there is a great deal of neighbourliness and community spirit, and that many, many people work very hard indeed. When I compare my mothers life with a

large family to my own, I am grateful. I don't believe in the good old days.

Of course, there are things on the minus side too. The terrible wars going on for years. The shocking behaviour in the City and whole financial sector. (Although in my own bank they are all unfailingly kind and helpful). The way schools, post offices and even hospitals get closed down, with villages bereft. The way the BBC goes on and on about murder trials and the same with happy, but fairly trivial news, (but again some splendid programmes). The way when travelling by train or bus in the UK you often have to change companies - who are often getting huge subsidies.

Yours Sincerely
Jean Smith

Dear Mr Nick Pringle

I read your appeal in the South Wales Evening Post, and so felt I had to contact you about my experience in the Army. I enlisted in Dec 1942 to Beverley, Yorkshire for 6 weeks, then posted to Catterick, to the 51st Training Regt R.A.C. I completed my training in July 1943 and was posted to Henley on Thames to join Special Force 2, then onto Leatherhead, Surrey to be attached to the Canadian Army. Special Force 2 was formed at Fawley Court, where the French, Polish, Dutch and Belgian agents including British were billeted. These were later parachuted into France in 1944 to set up the French underground with the French Resistance. Special Force 2 consisted of 25 R.A.C driver / mechanics (of which I was one), and 6 despatch riders. Also 20 Royal Signals.

In May 1944, I was moved to Petersfield, Hampshire ready for D-Day. Our pay at that time was 21 Shillings per week, and of that we had to send 7 Shillings home to our parents. From there I went to Normandy and landed on Juno Beach. The objective of special Force 2, on landing in France was to make contact with the French Resistance to gain information which was to be passed onto the front line. We proceeded through France, Belgium and Holland, and reached Utrecht for VE Day. I did not lose close mates, thank God, but everywhere was littered with the bodies of soldiers and burnt out tanks, not to mention the stench of cattle carcasses. (not to be forgotten.) In July 1945 I was posted to the Far East to join Force 136 in Ceylon.

In April 1947, I left India for the UK, onto Aldershot to be demobbed. I was given a 'beautiful' chalk stripe suit and a herring bone overcoat - very smart (I don't think!) We were given the grand sum of £54 & 6 Shillings and told to get on with life. No counselling in those days or 'syndromes'.

I was fortunate to be taken by my daughter and wife to Normandy under the government scheme - 'Veterans Returned'. It was to celebrate the 60th anniversary of D-Day. It was a very moving and emotional experience to visit the immaculate war graves in cemeteries of boys who were in their very young stage of their lives, who would be my age now.

Britain today in the 21st Century has really gone downhill - the drugs, drink and behaviour of young people today. There is a lack of respect for others. Perhaps National

Service could teach them a lot in discipline and respect for their elders. Their attitude to the older generation is very sad, but of course this does not apply to all young people. Perhaps the ones who get in trouble have no standards to behave by. Children need boundaries to guide them in life.

I along with thousands of others gave the best time of their lives to save our country from the Nazis, and there were more thousands who gave their lives in concentration camps so that we should have peace. I was one of the lucky ones to return home, and I thank God for that every day. I now have a wonderful wife and family who give me all their support. If I had not returned unscathed - our family would not be.

God bless you
Glyndwr Gough

Dear Mr Pringle

With reference to your letter in our local paper on various topics i.e World War II. Before the war; I am talking the twenties and thirties. this was a beautiful country, everyone helped each other as all families were alike. There was poverty everywhere but people pulled together. We have been let down by politicians of all parties and are still suffering through their stupid mistakes.

I am 85 years of age and was called up at 18 being joined to the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI). After training I joined the regular 2/4 Battalion as a volunteer which was being posted overseas. This being Algeria, North Africa in January 1943. After a few weeks we were sent to the front line after the 16th Battalion Durham Light Infantry had heavy casualties. Our company was posted permanent to the Durhams and I stayed with them until demob in 1946.

We were one of the main battalions who were at the main Salerno landings in Italy, of the 46th Division. The Oak tree emblem. There was very heavy fighting but the Durhams were a force to be reckoned with, as the lads were great and the very best of comrades. They tell me there is a plaque at Salerno thanking the 46th Division for helping to liberate the country. I enjoyed every minute of my service with the Durhams even though we were up in the front line and dangerous, we got on with the job in hand. The higher authorities always had a good word for the Durhams, as they knew they would see the job done. It is surprising after all these years your mind can recollect many minute details of what happened during the war years.

Yours Sincerely
George Lyons

(Replies to questions)

What are your memories of the events at Salerno?

I was only a young man of 19 when we invaded Salerno and I had just finished the war

in North Africa with the First Army, so I was like a veteran although 19 at Salerno. We came ashore waist high in water with our pay book, cigarettes and ammunition in our helmets and our rifles in the high to keep them dry. The battle when we landed was tremendous and many lads killed, but we held our ground and eventually we got a foot hold and held the land that we had captured. It was very nerve racking and this went on for days. But we were young and the excitement of battle was with us all, as the Durhams were not a lot to be beaten.

What were your happiest and saddest moments of the war?

In November 1944 we were sent to Greece to keep the peace between the Royalists and Republicans and a number of us were taken prisoners by the republican movement and were marched from just outside Pireaus to right up north to Volos where we had to clear a cow shed out to sleep in. There was a foot of snow down and we had to wash in a frozen pond. We were eventually released by the Americans. We were in a terrible state, existing on brown bread and water.

Do you have any anecdotes, funny memories, songs, traditions from the Durham Light Infantry?

We as Yorkshire men used to enjoy the words that the Durham lads used to say and when they used to sing the Blaydon Races we all joined in.

What do you think your fallen comrades would have made of Britain in 2009?

If the fallen could only speak now they would ask the question 'Was it worth the sacrifice?' as the ones giving the orders were miles away and lives didn't matter to them, only victory at any cost.

How did you adapt to Civvy Street?

We had to adapt quickly as we went to war as boys and came out men and we had to work to see to our families, not like today where the State keeps them. After the war if you didn't work there was no money until the Welfare State was formed in 1948.

Do you think the WWII veterans received enough support from governments in recent decades?

I think that the Government has no time for the elderly. They have outstayed themselves and are not putting anything into the economy, but have paid in taxes for over fifty years, so we have done our share.

What is your opinion of the country now and how does it differ from the Britain of your youth?

I tell my grand-children that before the war this was a beautiful country, but since the war all politicians of all parties have ruined this country and the up coming future generations will pay for past mistakes.

Dear Mr Pringle

Re; Your advert in the Ayrshire Post - I am almost 90 years old; I write to tell you that I served in the WAAF for 4 years 1942-46.

My late husband was in the RASC and served in India and Burma for 4 years from 1942-46. He was called up in 1939. He did the full 7 years. Whilst in Burma he lost some of his friends in Japanese prisoner of war camps. He also visited the memorial at Kohima, which as you know reads 'When you go home tell them of us. For your tomorrow we gave our today.' I do not think they would think it was worth their dying, for the state of the world today, especially our own country. What with our MPs stealing from the taxpayers, for greed and the recession, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the losses almost every day of our young men and women. For what?

I think 'they' would be utterly disgusted and disappointed at what is happening to our once great country, as I am.

Good luck, Yours Sincerely
Mrs Marjorie Corry

Dear Nick

Re; your letter in the Exmouth Journal. I joined the WAAF as soon as I was old enough when I was 17 1/2 . I can remember the day I was called to go my mother was going to come with me and I was worried sick all the other girls might think; oh what a baby. So I went and it was quite late at night when I arrived in Gloucester and you had to have all these different exams and medical no matter what time you arrived. It was in the middle of December, miserable and cold, it was 1942.

I trained as a driver. The first station I was on was a Lancaster Bomber station and I just couldn't understand how these crews would go off and then very few of them would come back, but they would still have a party in the evening and at the time I thought 'Oh gosh that's awful, how could they' but of course now in retrospect of course if they hadn't of done that they probably wouldn't have been able to carry on. It must have been very frightening.

We used to lie in the Nissan hut and hear them go off, then count them as they came back. Then I moved to a Beaufighter station, that was Coastal Command and I used to take them out to their planes. Two of them came to my husbands funeral five years ago and one said how they used to look at us as they left, knowing that we would be the last person they would see when they took off and hoping that they would see us if they got back. I never realised that at the time, it's only now when you look back do you realise what they must have gone through. I also served on a Halifax station.

My husband, (Bob Hollands DFM), was a pilot on a Beaufighter. At about aged 21 he was shot down in the Bay of Biscay. They were looking for the Scharnhorst. The Beaufighter just had a crew of two; pilot and navigator. They were shot down, fortunately one of the crew saw it happen and radioed back where his position was and

there was a Canadian destroyer, the *Onslo* in the vicinity, and they picked them up. A newsreel cameraman was on board, they had been in battle, and this cameraman filmed the whole thing. He was in a dinghy with his navigator and they filmed them and gave them a cigarette. Everyone smoked in those days! It was on the newsreel at the cinema, the same newsreel would be on for about three days.

They were in the water quite a few hours, but it wasn't as bad as some of them who were in there for days, at least they were saved. A lot of them were taken prisoner as well, most of them were in Bomber Command.

When I look back they all seemed older than their years, when I think about it they were really all quite young, but they didn't seem young. It wasn't just their looks, it was their attitude. It was the way of life sort of thing, it must have been really frightening. When I look back they were just boys really. One of my jobs at RAF Northcoats was putting out the goose necks, the lights on the runway so they could see when they came back. Everything went on as normal as possible, they used to go to the ops room and make their reports and if someone didn't return the others would say 'poor old so and so's gone for a burton' that was one of the expressions. They had to, when I first joined I thought it was a hard attitude, but they just had to be like that. I remember one raid at Northcoats, I think we thought we were invincible. We didn't seem to worry, we just gone on with things.

A lot of them had problems after the war, depression, and things like that. There has been a lot said about these boys nowadays getting terrible Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but it wasn't heard of in our day. They had to put up with it. My husband ended up with depression and I'm pretty sure it was due to what he went through in the war.

At one of the stations I was on, Luffenham, they were doing some practice bombing. I was driving the bomb lorry. I'd been driving all morning and then about lunch time I was getting hungry, so I went to ask if I could be relieved, so I could have something to eat. So one of the girls did this for me and when I look back I think it was meant to be because there was a nasty accident. One of the bombs went off and one of the boys was sadly, badly injured. The girl that had relieved me had been a nurse and she knew what to do and tied a tourniquet. I often think about that, because had it been me I would not have known what to do. She saved his life, he did lose a leg, but had it been me the poor man would have probably died.

My mother lived in Leicester. I remember once bombs coming down and there was factories on fire, standing there watching the flames. You would see lists at the ends of the road saying who had been killed the previous night. One thing that made me very cross was when they started complaining about having a statue of Bomber Harris, saying he should never have bombed Dresden, but you know the Germans bombed London, they bombed Coventry, they bombed us very, very badly. I know loads of people who lost their homes, lost everything, so why criticise us for bombing Dresden? It was terrible, they went through it and they more or less just had to get on with it.

I watched the programme about the badly burned aircrew, McIndoes Guinea Pig Club. I thought they were marvellous. The fellas were so cheerful it was

unbelievable. *(The Guinea Pig Club was formed by RAF patients of pioneering plastic surgeon, Sir Archibald McIndoe, while undergoing extensive and multiple operations to rebuild their severely burnt bodies and faces at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead. Many had lost ears, lips, eyelids, fingers, and even noses as a result of burns caused from burning aircraft. The reason they named themselves the guinea pigs was because they were being literally being tested on with new techniques and procedures by New Zealand born Sir Archibald. He recognised that healing the psychological scars was to be important in their recovery as surgery and encouraged locals in East Grinstead to invite them to their homes for tea and welcome them into the pubs and allowed them to wear their service uniforms instead of convalescence uniforms. East Grinstead became known as 'the town that did not stare.'* By the end of the war there was 649 members of the club and 80% were from Bomber Command. The friendship formed between the Guinea Pigs and the medical staff that helped them recover lasted for decades after the war. The final re-union was held in 2007.)

We had one day off a week and sometimes I did shift work and instead of going to bed, I'd come away really, really tired instead of going to bed, by the time I had a shower I'd be wide awake and go out for the rest of the day. We made wonderful friends, some I kept in touch for years. We did have wonderful friendships, it was sad but there was good times.

You asked if we were happy the way the country has turned out. When the victims of crime are more often in trouble than the villains - the answer is no! This is not what our brave lads fought for. Good luck.

Yours Sincerely
Eve Hollands

Dear Nick

At last I find time to write to you. Our country is a great disappointment to me. We are over run by people who in my opinion have no right to be here. They flood in and drain our benefits system and resources such as housing etc.

I had no problem on my return to civilian life. I was discharged on pension, having been wounded. My parents welcomed me home and being a compositor / linotype operator by trade and work being plentiful I was soon back in the newspaper business. During my leave I had access to unlimited horse manure, so grew mushrooms in the air raid shelter and had quite a business trading mushrooms for eggs etc.

I was taken prisoner in France and was a POW for six years. I spent a lot of time in and around Danzig, on the Baltic coast, working on various projects including the local gasworks, as a so called engineer. Before then it was the water works, laying and renewing mains in the city. As the war ended, as the Germans were retreating, I became mixed up with them. It was sheer hell on earth. Night and day became one. Two foot of snow and 30 degrees below! I slept with farm animals, including a huge pig, to keep alive. Eventually the Americans reached us and flew us in Dakotas to an airfield in the south of England, where we were deloused and after a few days preparation were given

a rail pass for home sweet home.

Yours Sincerely
Percy Kear

What are your memories of your capture and where were you at the time?

In a highly disorganised situation a few of us found ourselves at Lambersart, close to Lille. We barricaded ourselves in an establishment, the Moulin Rouge, only to be stormed by a mopping up contingent of German troops. A stick grenade aimed at me severed an artery/vein in my leg. A first-aider tore off my gas mask and used the strap as a tourniquet as I was losing a lot of blood. I finished up in hospital in Lille on the floor, as the place was overflowing with casualties, a lot of them dead.

Where were you kept prisoner and what were conditions like?

I spent a few years in Danzig in a first class camp. Along with others I volunteered for all manner of jobs, working alongside Poles and Danzigers, with spells at the gas works and a local building firm. We dug out the footings for some flats, about 2ft deep, and instead of filling them with concrete we replaced most of the sand and put just a thin covering of concrete. When mixing concrete we always got the proportions 'mixed up' and always got the ratio of sand, cement and gravel confused!

The camp was raided about once a month, early, really early, looking for secret radios, civilian clothes, or anything else we should not have had. We traded clothing we received which ended up with the Polish underground, a wool sweater was worth 15 eggs. A bar of chocolate and real coffee also had their exchange value.

What are your memories of your guards? Was there much mistreatment?

In my experience there were very few problems with the guards. As the war progressed the guards got older and then when the source of manpower dried up they got younger, boys just in their teens were looking after us eventually.

How did the lads keep their spirits up whilst in captivity?

Keeping up our spirits and remaining optimistic was never a problem. We made our own darts and dart boards, a lot of reading, and I learnt to play bridge. Darts were made from copper tubes and steel nails, plus a small amount of molten lead. Where did we get the materials? It was amazing what some chocolate and some cigarettes would do! Of course the mail and Red Cross parcels helped.

There was never any doubts in anyone's mind as to what the final outcome of the war would be. The longer it continued, the more certain it became. We knew within hours of events as they happened, including the D-Day landings.

What are your memories of Danzig and your working conditions?

My memories of Danzig are good as life was highly organised. Apart from the people we worked with our civilian contact was almost nil. At one stage the Baltic was frozen; we collected ice for the shops etc. in the town.

Did you lose any mates during the war?

I lost all contact with my military contacts, as I finished up in hospital, then into a barracks. I was the only Englishman, so I was treated as French. They were being returned to civvy street to help France return to normal. They wanted me to join them, but my French was not good enough, and I would still be listed as missing. A priest saw me with a view to getting word through about me, but that did not work out. Eventually I joined other British POWs and was transported by barge, living off green mouldy bread and lard.

DEATH MARCH

At midnight on January 21st, 1945 we received orders to evacuate the camp. Suitcases and packs were drawn from the stores. In most cases as much clothing as possible was worn. Sledging was improvised from stools, and it was arranged that the remaining stock of Red Cross parcels should follow on a wagon drawn by two oxen. This was found to be impracticable owing to the deep snow on the roads. Horses were substituted and the parcels reached the base camp (Marienburg XXB). Many parcels were left, which would be welcome for the retreating German forces. Our first march to Marienburg was approximately 30 miles, walking knee deep in snow and was accomplished in 16 hours.

Marienburg was evacuated on the night of January 23rd. It was bitterly cold and movement was extremely difficult owing to the frozen state of the ground and snow, in some places very deep. The 10,000 men were split into columns some 500 strong, with one German guard to 10 men. We followed the River Nogat for two miles, suitcases and packs of food already being dumped by overloaded men. As we crossed the frozen river the ice could be heard cracking and there was a surge forward by the men in the centre to reach the opposite bank and safety. A column in our rear lost a great number of men through the ice giving way completely. The river at this point is very deep. The River Weiphsel was crossed at Dirschau where we halted in a field for five hours. Somehow fires were lit, which gave a little warmth, and we were able to make a hot drink.

It was amazing to see so many dead horses by the roadside, worked to exhaustion then shot. The roads were crammed with refugees. this compelled us to take to the fields to make any head way at all, wading waist deep through snow drifts and being forced to assist stranded German lorries. After a fortnight's march we arrived at Stalag IID. The thaw had now set in and snow was replaced with rain and roads were flooded. This meant sleeping in saturated clothing and blankets. Washing or shaving was impossible and by this time we all had beards and tresses of all colours.

Another five days march brought us to a Marine camp at Misdroy where we received one litre of soup made from pea powder. At night we were packed into a two storey concrete building. Russians occupied the top and British the bottom floor. Sleep was out of the question as we were packed so tight that it was impossible to even sit down! We were thankful the next morning to get into the fresh air and moving on the

road again towards better, or perhaps worse conditions

We had now marched approximately 250 miles and now, travelling along the coastal road, how pleasing it was to look upon the blue water of the Baltic instead of tramping through the monotonous tracks of sand roads with pine forests each side, where you just put your head down and marched. A forced march brought us to the ferry which took us across the first of two small islands - Swinemunde. Here bartering trade was exceptionally brisk. A large number of French civilians were billeted in the area, and they took advantage of our plight, giving us only small pieces of bread for soap, cigarettes etc. Leaving the ferry, marching was resumed.

It was pouring with rain and so dark that we could only sense the direction of the man immediately in front. We were hungry, and man after man fell out. Even the guards were nearing revolt, but in the inky darkness we could not take advantage of the position. How thankful we were to reach a barn where we were to sleep. Each man just staggered in and flopped down utterly exhausted. A quick recovery was made, however, when we were told that potatoes boiled in their jackets were waiting for us! That was the spirit the Germans could not understand. The meal was devoured like hungry wolves and we went to sleep with the happy knowledge that the next day was free and that meant, no marching.

Resuming our march we came to Mellentin, where we received some bread - two loaves to twenty five men. We eventually crossed to the mainland by bridge. At Rostow we received one Red Cross parcel to five men. We were here a fortnight and during that time did three days' work at the neighbouring town of Ludwiglust, starting to clear some of the terrible mess left by the Allied bombers. It was a hopeless task, however, and we often wondered why we were sent there. Crossing the River Elbe, we made our way towards Magdeburg, which we reached on Good Friday.

On April 11 we were issued with marching rations and told to leave, as the town was in a state of defence, being occupied by German troops only. The district now was subjected to non stop bombings by our planes, of which we saw a number shot down and some of our paratroops taken prisoner by our guards. Marching now became very hard as we were zigzagging all over the country to miss advancing forces and the hardships we had gone through were having their effect on the men. We had been without a bath for a long time and we dared not take off our boots and socks as we had doubts about getting them on again. We estimated at this point we had marched 650 miles.

Our bombers were over continually and often we were compelled to dive into hedges and woods for comparative safety. We witnessed some grand sights of attacks on railway stations, petrol dumps blown sky high, the bombs being clearly seen as they left the planes.

On April 26 we were released by an American officer who with an automatic disarmed our guards with the words, "OK now boys". Five years! We were in American hands 14 days, and that did much to ease our plight. Every day made a difference to our appearance. On May 11th the day we had waited for dawned. American planes flew us to Brussels, where we had complete new clothing and a bath. After a few hours wait RAF planes landed us at Amesbury, where we received a

glorious welcome from WVS workers. Another bath, and again new clothing, then after papers being signed, ration cards issued, medical officer visited etc we were ready for the train journey home.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the men who fell out. They were broken in health, but not in spirit.

Dear Sir

Having read your advert re; us WWII veterans left, I thought I you might like to have my views and opinion of today.

This country has become the laughing stock of the world with gutless MP's who have lost control and out to sneak every penny they can from the taxpayer. No discipline or respect. When I left the Army after 10 years I got a job with BOAC/BA until I retired at 65. No problem.

Reference support for veterans. I would like to point out I was a POW for five years. In the late 1950's Germany paid a sum of £1,000,000 to our government to be shared amongst us for the work we were forced to do, and so far we have not received a penny from either the Tory or Labour governments despite our complaining and support from the national press. There were about 46,000 of us who had to stay behind to cover the retreat of the B.E.F to the UK. What rogues M.P's are.

Like many others we are fed up with the way we have been let down. If you are ethnic or an immigrant you are looked after, but being 100% British it is hard luck. Many of our comrades who gave their lives must be turning in their graves, all for nothing.

I was a corporal in the Royal Military Police, wounded and taken POW 29th May 1940. When Stukas dive bombed us my L/Cpl was killed. I was placed in an ambulance with three others and on the way to St Omer Hospital a tank shot us up, hitting the driver and medic and more wounds. After about three months in hospital, about three hundred were got together and placed on a train, forty to a wagon, with a loaf of bread and a chunk of meat and after two days arrived in Dortmund, where we roughed it on a football ground. From here we moved again, more in number and about three days later arrived in Strasbourg and put in French barracks.

Here food was bad, a bowl of so called soup and two slices of bread a day. We were officially registered as POWs, my number was 117 and it took about six months before our folks heard that we were alive. Whilst in Strasbourg we made many friends with lice and bed bugs, it came as a shock. Here we also made friends and helped each other. After some months we travelled again to Lamsdorf Stalag 8B, taking four or five days. What a trip. Here, after being messed about, we were given a barrack, about a hundred men to each. This stalag was controlled by a RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major) Welsh Guards who though he was still in Caterham, the Guards depot. We also received our first Red Cross parcels here. Manna from Heaven.

I became pals with a P.Fish now deceased and we stayed together, going out on working parties to get away from the main camp. Our first stop was Posan, road

repairing. next stop; Seizdorf, stone quarrying, then Zwittau sugar beet factory and last stop which I cannot remember was tree felling, making pit props. Quite a tour around, but at least we were fit and with our parcels, kept going.

The final day came in late October 44 when we had about one hours notice to collect our things and get walking. The Russians were on their way. Oh boy, what a walk from Eastern Silesia to where; not even the guards knew and it was cold with deep snow and very cold nights with very little food. Alas some of our mates did not make it and perished in the cold, no matter how we tried to help each other. During this walk we went round in circles and must have covered five to seven hundred miles. We eventually arrived at Regensburg where the Americans had halted, waiting for the Reds (Soviet Union) to arrive. We stayed there for a few days awaiting aircraft to fly us home and landed at Horsham on the 27th May 1945, back to the Army bull again.

After six weeks leave and two months refresher course it was back to Hamburg, where I stayed until I came out after ten years service, not A1 as required. I am now 89 and still look back on the wonderful comradeship we had. Now it is everyone for themselves. I have many stories I could tell, all true, of what happened whilst I was in Hamburg. I travelled around a lot and when I asked a Jerry about British POWs, I got the right answer. 'Ganz frick!' meaning mad. They just could not take the trouble we caused.

Yours Sincerely a young at heart
JW Lockyer

(Replies to questions)

What are your memories of the camp guards? How did they treat you and did you get to know any and learn what their outlook was?

Until the fall of Stalingrad they thought they were God's gift to the world. After that they became frightened and tried to get on good terms with us. Some of the lads fell for it, but many of us kept taunting them in response to the way we had been treated for a couple of years. We would slip chocolate or cigs in their pockets and report them for stealing. The penalty was to be sent to the Russian front. Poles that joined the German Army were very dangerous to deal with and could not be trusted. The overall outlook towards Hitler was very low.

What were your impressions of Nazi Germany? Did you get to meet any ordinary people (civilians)?

I met a number of civilians on working parties. many were outright Hitlerites, others acted dumb (*would not talk*). The Gestapo had them under control.

Was there any escape attempts at your camp? How did you and the lads keep your spirits up?

On one working party at Selzdorf two boys tried but were caught after two days. We were too far away in Poland to try. The boys kept their spirits up by playing up and

taunting them and going slow on some work parties.

Note. When I was wounded and taken to St Omer Hospital a French doctor wanted to amputate my leg. When the Jerry (*German*) doctor came round I spoke to him and he operated on my leg and saved it, from which I thank him from the bottom of my heart. Needless to say I am now an invalid but disciplined and get out everyday come what may.

Did you lose any mates, if so who were they? What happened to them and what are your memories of them?

The day I got wounded 28 May, my mate was within two yards of me and I turned to see if he was OK and he ran about five yards minus his head before going down. Myself I was wounded in the right leg and back by bomb blast.

Were you aware of the concentration camps whilst in Germany? Did you see anything that stood out whilst on the move and whilst working?

Yes, at one time we were about a mile from Auschwitz and the smell of burning bodies and seeing some of the Jews going to work in a factory was out of this world and not one of us could help them. We tried to throw chocolate to them, only to be hit with rifle butts from our bloody minded guards.

Do you have any memories of getting one over your captors or funnier moments whilst POW?

Many a time we cheated them. For example tea from Red Cross parcels. We would use, dry, re-pack and ploy it to the guards for bread or eggs. Working in a place called Zwittau at a sugar beet factory we were informed that if we stole sugar we would be shot. As they searched they never found any, but we had about half a ton stored in the loft. (*This scheme worked well, until one day John was washing by a river and heard an almighty crash. The weight of the sugar had made the ceiling fall in!*) When leaving Strasbourg late 1940 we were told by a Jerry officer should we see a German General we were to raise our arm - the Hitler salute. It occurred and we did as instructed but yelled "Heil Churchill!", more bashings from rifle butts. ---??

What were you doing before war broke out and what was your circumstances?

I did odd jobs until 18 waiting to enlist, which I did until November 1938. I came from a military family. Dad in the R.A Mum in the Q.A.I.M.N.S (Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service) I was born in the military hospital, Millbank.

What are your most vivid memories of the forced march in the snow near the end of the war?

Four months of starving, being cold and wet not knowing where the hell we were going. Even the guards had no idea and seeing both guards and POWs smashing to the ground, where alas some passed away. Also having a visit from the RAF who thought we were Jerries and fired causing injuries and death. I was with Pete Fish, Royal

Norfolks and Albert Standen, Royal Sussex. On the march things went wrong. It was thirty years before we met again thinking that we had expired on the march and have kept our friendship going until alas both are looking down at me writing.

As part of the rear guard as the B.E.F evacuated, what are your memories of the fighting and the Brits left behind that were putting up the defence?

The majority of our troops were TA (Territorial Army) some without rifles, so took from fallen comrades. We all fought until we went down surrounded by Rommels and Gudarins tanks. All we had was a few Bren gun carriers - useless. What was lacking was officers, many had run off to Dunkirk, with sergeants doing there best but to no good. Thanks to Churchill and the War Cabinet no medal was struck for us 40,000 left behind. The order was no medals for retreating but we knew we had to fight the rear guard action come what may.

Have you been back to Germany in recent years and how did you find the country & people?

The last time I was in Germany was July 1946 until I was invalided and four years later stationed in Hamburg and Cologne. One felt sorry for the women and children and help was given, but I as an ex POW still had thoughts of the past.

As an 89 year old veteran, what would you say to the Prime Minister and Government given the chance?

I have already written to him before his holiday, stating he and the MOD should put on uniforms and go and fight with the boys instead of making a complete cock up as they keep doing. Needless to say no reply. In other words - Gutless.

(Later John told me that his mother had been in the Queen Alexandria Nursing Corp since WW1. During the Blitz on London she was on the way to a school that had been bombed to provide emergency medical care. The ambulance she was travelling in was hit and sadly she was killed. It was only after John returned to London after returning from Germany that he discovered the terrible news. His house had been bombed as well, not a thing left.)

Thanks, to all contributors who have made this book possible. It has been a great privilege to hear from them all.

When I was first researching local newspapers to send the letter out in Autumn 2006 I came across some reports of WWII generation pensioners being victims of attacks in various local papers. I kept a copy of them, then later found more. I decided to keep a record. The following is by no means a comprehensive list, just cases I came across. A few were national news, but most were regional. All of the victims are either WWII veterans or were of working age during the war. A generation of people who remember

a Britain where it was common to go out without even bothering to lock the door. (Recorded crime increased ten fold between 1951 and 2001. The police recorded 513,559 crimes in 1951, in 2001 they recorded over 5 million. Source; Home Office - Recorded crime statistics 1898 - 2002/3) Sadly, some 'Unknown Warriors' survived the war but did not survive living in the Britain of their old age. They all deserved a peaceful end to their days but some ended their lives in fear after being attacked or worse, died alone, in terror, as they were murdered.

It is interesting to think how the country would be now if in the decades following the war, the wartime generation had voted not for political parties just once every five years, who then do what they want, but on individual issues in a direct democracy system of referendums. The country would, most likely, be much more similar in many ways to the country they fought to defend in 1940.

MURDERED AT HOME - Severe blow to the head with a blunt instrument, OAP lady burgled at home. Died in hospital 10 days later. Suffolk, Feb 93

STRANGLED & BEATEN TO DEATH - 84 year old man murdered during an attack on his home, invaders stole his licensed guns that he used to hunt with. Ramsgate, Nov 96

PUSHED TO THE FLOOR - 8th Army WWII veteran attacked in his home for his wallet, Lancashire, Nov 97

ASPHYXIATED - 88 year old lady bound with her own shoelaces and smothered to death with cushions by two home intruders, Bognor Regis, Dec 98

KICKED TO DEATH - 87 year old lady in her home by two young female attackers from the same block of flats. London, Feb 00

HOME INTRUDER - stabs pensioner to death in her sheltered housing flat. Poole, Jul 00

TAUNTED TO DEATH - WWII REME war veteran after months of harassment from local jobs brandishes an air pistol. Arrested. Hung himself on day of his court appearance. Aldershot, May 01

D-DAY VETERAN BEATEN - Facial Injuries and fractured cheekbone, Oldham, May 01

DEATH FROM INJURIES - 87 year old lady attacked and mugged on the street yards from her home. Left with broken wrist and hip and facial injuries. Spent 4 months in hospital and died there. Warrington, Nov 01

KILLED WITH CARVING KNIFE - Pensioner, 79, killed in her home by intruder.

Stabbed at least 5 times to the stomach and chest, Suffolk, Dec 01

FRAIL 88 YR OLD - Mugged for her shopping bag. Broken cheekbone, arm, fractured nose and broken ribs - died 3 days later in hospital, London, Jan 02

MURDER BY STRANGLING - 80 year old lady strangled to death by home intruder, South Yorkshire, Jan 02

MURDERED - 77 year old lady murdered by home intruder. She had been burgled 3 times before this one that resulted in her death. Despite acute arthritis she had attempted to resist the attacker. Argyll & Bute, Mar 02

KILLED FOR £2 FISH SUPPER - Partially sighted OAP attacked by two muggers, died later in hospital from her injuries- broken ribs, broken arm etc. Newcastle, Apr 02

DOUBLE MURDER - 88 year old lady strangled and stabbed in the neck on her farm. A

friend, 82 year old man stabbed and slashed 18 times in the farmhouse. Llangollen, May 02

DIED PROTECTING WIFE - Wheelchair bound 84 year old man died protecting wife, (83) from home attackers, beat around head and collapsed. Wolverhampton, May 02

GREAT GRANDMOTHER - Left with dislocated shoulder, three dislocated fingers, a broken wrist, a cracked bone in her right arm and four stitches to a head wound after street gang attack. A dozen other cases including 86 yr old lady who suffered a dislocated shoulder, Salford, May 02

HIT & RUN - (82) WWII veteran, aide of General Eisenhower run over and left to die, London, May 2002

HEART REMOVED - blood drank and body sexually assaulted, 90 year old lady horrifically murdered by intruder in her own home, North Wales, Aug 02

KEPT ON DOG LEASH - 84 year old lady found in care home tied to chair by a dog leash. Grimsby, Oct 2002

RAPED & MURDERED - 4ft11in 87 year lady killed by intruder that had already attacked her once before in her home a year earlier, Mansfield, Sept 02

KILLED FOR £13 - 85 year old devout Christian and ex midwife died of head injuries after mugging. London, Dec 02

BEATEN TO DEATH - 92 year old lady found with multiple rib fractures, blows to the face, head and neck, a ruptured liver and a broken larynx, London, Jan 03

REIGN OF TERROR - WWII war veteran with lung cancer- slit throat and stabbed in chest, died later in hospital. 10 other attacks on elderly for pension including an 85 year old man pushed to floor, lady (85) broken hip and dislocated shoulder and lady (82) stabbed in the hand. London, Dec 02-Feb 03

KILLED - 83 yr old Grandma mugged in street by two robbers (who carried out another 16 attacks in one month) and died in hospital of head injuries. London, Feb 03

MURDERED - 82 year old lady punched in face and kicked by two 'men' who preyed on elderly victims. Fought back with stick. Died a few days later in hospital, Mar 03, London

KILLED BY SMOTHERING - Intruders switched off electricity then the 91 year old lady was tied up and beaten with a duster forced in mouth and pillowcase over her head. Found by carers dead lying on her bed. Ayrshire, Jul 03

84 YEAR OLD - Sexually assaulted in broad daylight, while walking down a street, Crewe, Jul 03

STABBED TO DEATH - 78 year old man body found murdered with knife wounds, Lancashire, Jul 03

90 YEAR OLD - collapses with trauma and dies after confronting a conman who came into her home and took money, Essex, Jul 03

DEAD ON ARRIVAL - 85 year old man stabbed by two burglars in his bedroom. Died in the ambulance taking him to hospital, Devon, Aug 03

POPPY SELLER - Normandy veteran attacked with hammer while out selling poppies, suffering wounds to his head and arms. Aylesbury, Nov 03

MERCHANT NAVY - veteran (81) with two walking sticks repels home attacker, treated for shock by Paramedics, Oxfordshire, Dec 03

SHOT DEAD - 83 year old WWII Army colonel shot dead on his doorstep, found dead the following morning by his carer. Hertfordshire, Jan 04

LOCKED IN - 80 yr old lady assaulted and left with severe bruising and swelling, then locked in her home by the intruder. Bolton, Jan 04

INDECENT ASSAULT - On 81 yr old lady in her own home and 87 yr old husband attacked, Dorset, Apr 04

DEATH FROM INJURIES - 82 year old lady attacked in the street, left with fractured leg and shoulder, died later in hospital. London, Apr 04

SERIOUS SEXUAL ASSAULT - on 81 year old lady with senile dementia, Reading, Jun 04

DIED OF INJURIES - 89 year old lady dies of injuries 11 days later in hospital after being savagely beaten in her own home by intruder, Birmingham, Oct 04

COVERED IN BLOOD - 82 yr old lady punched and kicked in the face in her home and died 10 days later, London, Oct 04

CHRISTMAS EVE MURDER - 93 year old lady repeatedly stabbed in her hallway by attacker who then stole £70. Glasgow, Dec 04

KNEED IN THE BACK - grabbed around the throat, 93 year old lady attacked at cash point machine, Dorset, Jan 05

STABBED 14 TIMES - 84 yr old lady knifed to death in her own home. London, Mar 05

SAVAGE MURDER - 90 year old lady attacked in a home raid and died of head injuries later in hospital, Wrexham, Sept 05

PARTIALLY SIGHTED - hard of hearing 85 yr old man mugged for £8, dislocated shoulder and cuts. Died in hospital 3 weeks later, London, Dec 05

DESERT RAT - 95, murder enquiry after being pinned down by gang in his own home, resulting in death. Norfolk, Jan 06

KICKED TO THE GROUND - Ex-Marine (84), survivor of D-Day Landings mugged of his blazer, medal, cigars and loose change. Bristol, Mar 06

BLOOD ALL OVER THE PAVEMENT - 82 year old lady attacked in broad daylight from behind. Thrown on floor. Glasses smashed & severe cut to the eye. Bradford, Apr 06

GLASSES REMOVED - made to sit on toilet, man in late eighties has house ransacked by two 'men'. Oxford, Apr 06

(The following are all since the letter appeared in the papers asking for wartime memories in Autumn 2006)

HOME GUARD - veteran (83) threatened that he would be shot in an attack on his home, County Armagh, Nov 06

DOUBLE RAID - War veteran (87) dies shortly after two attacks in the space of a fortnight. Lincolnshire, Dec 06

PARTIALLY DEAF WAR VETERAN - 92, Hit with vase from behind in home attack, then with his own walking stick, Oldham, Dec 06

100 YEAR OLD - WWII veteran fights off 3 cowardly muggers, cuts to head and bruised ribs, London, Feb 07

D-DAY HERO - 89, ex Royal Engineer sapper, attacked at home while caring for his wife who has Alzheimers, Head injuries and severe bruising, Notts, Feb 07

WHEELCHAIR BOUND - 83 year old lady with eye cataracts smashed in the face with a chair on a day out, Southport, May 07

FOUND IN CUPBOARD - Pensioner , 80, attacked with 22in meat skewer and later dies of his wounds, Birmingham, June 07

RELENTLESS HARASSMENT - Breeze blocks through window, Nazi Swastikas sprayed on the house of 85 yr old D-Day sailor, Sheffield, June 07

FOUND IN SUITCASE - in farm field. Burnt body of 94 yr old lady who had fled Germany in 1939. Murdered by cleaner for money. Strangled and beaten. London, Jul 07

DOUBLE ATTACK - By Balaclava wearing thief within a week one on a 91yr old the other on a 93 yr old, both left bruised and in shock. Essex, Jul 07

HELD AT KNIFEPOINT - 83 year old lady awoke to find intruder by her bed. Punched in the head, manhandled and left with severe bruising. Wedding ring from her late husband taken, Newham, London, Jul 07

PUSHED INTO CANAL - 83 yr old ex signaller Royal Navy, while fishing by 3 youths. Broke both legs and may not walk again, Merseyside, Sept 07

BLINDED ON TRAM - 96 year old war veteran, attacked on bus and left blind in one eye, Croydon, Oct 07

STRUCK IN FACE - 82 yr old lady attacked in her home for bank PIN number, died a day later. Prestatyn, Nov 07

92 YEAR OLD - lady assaulted by 2 'men' in raid on her home. Hampshire, Dec 07

TREATED BY PARAMEDICS - 89 year old lady pinned down in a raid on her home by two 'men', Nuneaton, Mar 08

COMMANDO - 85, served on Artic Convoys, Burma and Africa attacked in home, Burma Star cap badge and £700 stolen. Bristol, Mar 08

BEGGED HIM TO STOP - 92 year old lady pushed to ground injuring arm. Thief tried to take wedding ring from her and ransacked her home, Oldham, May 08

STABBED TO DEATH - 81 year old lady murdered at home by woman intruder, Surrey, May 08

BURIED IN WOODLAND - 87 year old lady, 5ft5in, walked with zimmer reported missing and found later in woods after being murdered. Perthshire, May 08

FOUND IN POOL OF BLOOD - 89 year old ex Green Howard WWII officer found by carer in home with severe injuries after home raid. Put on life support machine in intensive care, died 26 days later. Newcastle, May 08

ALZHEIMERS SUFFERER - (86) Pushed to floor and money stolen from her home, only one week after being targeted by conmen for £400, another 86 and one 90 also victims. Burnley, Jun 08

ATTACKED & ROBBED - 94 year old man opens door and is pushed aside by two home raiders, Stoke, Jul 08

KNIFE WIELDING INTRUDER - fought off by 88 yr old war veteran, who gave morse code signals on the beaches of Normandy, Derby, July 08

SERIOUS HEAD INJURIES - and broken wrist. 82 year old lady attacked in street for pension. Rochdale, Aug 08

PUNCHED & KICKED - waiting for bus. 82 year old lady left with severe bruising, Kilmarnock, Aug 08

RAPED - 88 year old lady sexually assaulted by home intruder, Accrington, Aug 08

WAR VETERAN - who served in Europe, India & Burma, bear hugged, throat and mouth grabbed, wallet stolen in Liverpool City Centre. Aug, 08

MACHETE ATTACK - 86 year old war veteran, masked raiders place pillow over his head, deep cuts to hands trying to defend himself. Dead two months later. Lancashire, Sept 08

BLIND PENSIONER - (85) dies in hospital after money taken in 'doorstep con', Birmingham, Oct 08

ATTACKED FROM BEHIND - 88 year old man pounced on, stick taken then threatened with it, but stood his ground. Leytonstone, Oct 08

DISABLED GRANDAD - (85) found shaking in wheelchair after home raided by three 'men', Burnley, Oct 08

BEATEN UNCONSCIOUS - 86 year old man knocked out in home robbery. Torquay, Oct 08

BATTERED IN HOUSE RAID - 82 year old punched and threatened, home ransacked. Dumfries & Galloway, Oct 08

BOGUS POLICEMAN - Breaks 82 year olds hip for £16, resulting in her death later in hospital. St Helens, Oct 08

DEAD TWO DAYS LATER, after attack in own home, needing treatment from paramedics, a man in his eighties dies of 'natural causes'. Maidenhead, Oct 08

BEATEN TO A PULP - Raider punches 92 year old ex doctor in the face repeatedly. Co. Durham, Oct 08

YORKSHIRE LADY - 87, Mugged resulting in death, South Yorkshire, Oct 08

ZIMMER FRAME BINGO PLAYER - 87, mugged on her way home by 6ft COWARD! Kilburn, London, Oct 08

85 YEAR OLD - Attacked and beaten in her own home. Ayrshire, 17th Oct/08

SEX ASSAULTS - 95 year old man and 96 year old lady latest victims of multiple sex attacker / rapist, believed to have carried out more than 100 sex crimes on the elderly over 16 years. S.E London/Kent, Oct 08

GUNMEN RAID - 85 year old dies 48 hours after being threatened by shotgun in his own home, Thames Valley, Oct 08

TRODDEN ON - 87 year old lady, punched in jaw, kicked in head, threatened to be killed, London, Oct 08

POPPY WEARING PENSIONER - More an example of their spirit. Ex WWII RAF (84) On Richmond High Street took on two hammer wielding balaclava robbers who were smashing the windows of a Jewellers in broad daylight. A crowd of 50 people did nothing as he grappled with them and removed a balaclava before they fled. Richmond, Nov 08

BLACK AND BLUE - 89 year old Arctic Convoy veteran viciously beaten in a home raid. Hospitalised with his 87 yr old ex ATS wife, with facial injuries and severe bruising. West Yorks, Nov 08

SEXUALLY ASSAULTED - 83 year old female WWII veteran raped in her home by a workman who spiked her drink with drugs. Blackpool, Jan 09

REPEATEDLY RAPED - 89 year old Lady repeatedly raped in her own home. An

Angolan has been charged, Leeds, Mar 09

KILLED IN HIT & RUN - 85 year old man left for dead by a Chinese illegal immigrant, who remains on the run a year later. Sheffield, Apr 09

FACE INJURIES & BROKEN LEG - 88 year old WWII Wren and widow of a sailor who rose to the rank of Admiral, who had survived the sinking of SS Britannia punched hard in the face outside her home, left with broken leg, Sussex, Jun 09

MURDERED - EVERY BONE IN FACE BROKEN - 85 year old widow attacked in a 'sustained and brutal' manner in her own home by intruder. Found dead days later. Hull, Jun 09

GANG ATTACK - 89 year old lady attacked by a gang described as either Asian or Eastern European in a park. Dislocated shoulder, fractures in arm and hip. £30 and bus pass stolen. Bradford, Jun 09

BROKEN SHOULDER & RIBS - 90 year old man attacked and robbed in the street. Edinburgh, Jul 09

BEATEN ROUND THE HEAD - 85 year old WW2 Royal Navy veteran, attacked for his bag, only a few hours after scattering his wives ashes. Left bloodied and bruised. West Sussex, Aug 09

MUGGED FROM BEHIND - 90 year old lady, mugged on the way to visit her husbands grave, left needing 6 stitches to her head and bruising. West Bromwich, Aug 09

BROKEN HIP - 85 year old lady attacked in own home. Four teenagers commended by police for identifying attacker and helping victim. Blackburn, Aug 09

MURDERED BY STRANGULATION - 85 year old lady, murdered by an intruder in her home who then set it alight to try and destroy evidence. Stockton, Sept 09

BROKEN HIP - 91 year old lady attacked on the street by a 14 year old girl, left with fractured hip. Pinner, Middlesex, Oct 09

WHEELCHAIR BOUND - 94 year old lady has her handbag taken by a drug addict while waiting for her friend to put the wheelchair in the back of the car. Oxford, Christmas 09

NEW YEARS DAY MURDER - 88 year old lady beaten to death on her doorstep after returning from visiting family. Southend, Essex, Jan 10

KNOCKED TO GROUND - 95 year old ex Battle of Britain Spitfire pilot, knocked to the ground by a home intruder who stole £200, in the second raid on his home in one year. Tiverton, Devon

SEX ASSAULT - 87 year old man sexually assaulted by an intruder in his home. Oldham, Lancs, Jan 10

KNIFED TO DEATH - 94 year old WWII veteran of Burma, Egypt and Borneo murdered. Repeatedly stabbed with knife by an intruder in his home. TV stolen. Borehamwood, Jan 10

BAG SNATCH - 86 year old lady stopped to give the time and was pushed onto the floor and her bag taken. Nelson, Lancs, Feb 10

BAG GRAB - 85 year old Scots Guard WWII veteran and his 86 year old wife were out struggling on icy pavements, when a car pulled up and violently grabbed the ladies handbag from her shoulder. Slough, Feb 10

GOOD FRIDAY PUNCHING - 90 year old lady attacked in her home by violent gang at

Easter. Oxford, Apr 10

VIOLENTLY RAPED - 89 year old lady raped in her own house by intruder.

Manchester, Apr 10

THROAT SLASHED - 85 year old WWII Burma veteran violent death by home intruder, Dorset, May 10

STABBED TO DEATH - 87 year old widowed great grandmother murdered by burglar in her 15th floor flat in tower block, Charlton, London, MAY 10

BROKEN NOSE - 85 year old lady attacked on the street by 32 year old man. Broken nose, gashed head and two black eyes, Netherton, West Midlands, Jun 10

ALZHEIMERS SUFFERER - 84 year old man returning from shopping attacked in flats hallway and threatened with broken bottle. Bus pass stolen. Camden, London, Jun 10

HIT & RUN - 91 year old lady recovering from cancer surgery hit by car and left with crippling injuries. Driver and passenger got out the car but then drove off without helping or phoning 999. Gravesend, June 10

TWISTED PREDATOR - Convicted rapist carried out four night home raids, tying up and indecently assaulting victims including two aged 87 and 94. Money stolen.

Callander, Scotland, Jul 10

MUGGED IN STREET - 92 year old WWII veteran attacked from behind outside his retirement complex, Manchester, Jul 10

MURDERED AT SHELTERED HOUSING - 88 year old lady found in her home, murdered with terrible injuries, Sunderland, Jul 10

MUGGING MURDER - 90 year old WWII Normandy veteran who was a driver for General Eisenhower mugged for £40 and his bus pass in the stairwell outside his flat. Left with broken bones etc, resulting in his death, South London, Aug 10

THROWN TO FLOOR - 90 year old Australian lady on a visit to the UK attacked after withdrawing money from cash machine, Dartford, Kent, Aug 10

FACE SLASHED - 83 year old lady attacked by knifeman in her home. Tied up, face and arms slashed with knife, puncture wounds and arm fractured, Newham, London, Aug 10

103 YEAR OLD - ex WWII blitz air raid warden dies after 'never being the same' after he was violently attacked in his home Oct. 2009 and thrown to the floor for £12, Croydon, Aug 10

FRACTURED CHEEKBONE - 83 year old lady attacked in the street for £20. Victim said 'I won't let this beat me, no. I would rather lie down and die.' Macclesfield, Sept 10

SEX ORDEAL - 89 year old lady sexually abused by home intruder who stripped naked. Leeds, Sept 10

BLUDGEONED WITH HAMMER - 86 year old lady attacked by intruder high on drugs who came in from kitchen back door. Emergency surgery for two skull fractures and a broken eye socket. Leeds, Sept 10

SEX ATTACK FILMED - 91 year old lady and her elderly carer forced to perform sex acts on each other by a gang leader who filmed them, to show as a 'trophy' to other gang members. Brixton, London, Sept 10

BURNT ALIVE - 96 year old lady dies of burns and smoke inhalation, after having her bed set deliberately on fire in a care home. Cleveleys, Lancashire, Oct 10

BRUTAL MURDER - 89 year old WWII veteran with a 'heart of gold' killed in his own home in violent attack, Blackburn, Oct 10

STREET ATTACK - 101 year old man with partial sight and poor hearing challenged gang after they kicked away his walking stick. Attacked and left hospitalised with facial injuries and cuts to arms and hands. Northampton, Oct 10

MUGGED 3 TIMES - 84 year old lady who lived with her 87 year old sister dies a few days after the 3rd mugging in 2 years, Burnley, Nov 10

OXYGEN TURNED OFF - 90 year old lady awoke gasping after burglars had deliberately switched off her vital oxygen supply, Bedworth, Warwickshire, Nov 10

KNIFE ON THROAT - 84 year old lady pushed to floor in her home by intruder and a 6 inch blade pushed onto her throat. Back injuries. Paisley, Dec 10

MURDER - 91 year old man found with severe head wounds at his home by his son over Christmas. Tottenham, London, Dec 10

DEATH ATTACK - 84 year old man returning from researching family tree was savagely attacked by a Turkish man in a park. Left with fractured skull, he later died as a result of his wounds. London, Jan 11

KICKED & BEATEN - 92 year old lady viciously attacked on her doorstep for £30, hospitalised. Manchester, Jan 11

BEATEN UP - 94 year old lady attacked by intruder in her bedroom of a care home. Drawers ransacked. Bradford, Jan 11

5 HOME RAIDS - 93 year old Home Guard veteran dies shortly after the 5th burglary by the same man in one month. Birmingham, Jan 11

MURDER DOWN UNDER - 87 year old lady found murdered in her back garden by home intruder. Adelaide, Australia Jan 11

MURDER - 89 year old lady, found dead with head injuries at her home in Ryhl, believed to be a relative of Captain Habesch, a WWII naval veteran, Wales, Feb 11

DISLOCATED SHOULDER - 85 year old mugged in the street, thrown to floor, dislocating shoulder but refused to let go of her bag., Stockton, Feb 11

BATTERED TO DEATH - 86 year old lady killed in her own home in a viscous attack by intruder, Bromley, Feb 11

BEATEN WITH OWN WALKING STICK - Man in his 80's beaten by three intruders. Bridgnorth, Shropshire, Mar 11

BATTERED & BRUISED - 88 year old lady dies after serious care home neglect. One of 650 similar deaths in the last 5 years according to a recent report. Middlesborough, Apr 11

KILLED ON THE STREET - 88 year old WWII Royal Navy veteran thrown to floor in a daylight mugging, dies 6 days later in hospital. Walking stick taken by robber. Stirlingshire, Apr 11

MANSLAUGHTER - 87 year old WWII Royal Marine veteran attacked in his home by two men. Hospitalised with bleeding on brain and broken hip. Died a few weeks later in hospital of heart attack. Oswestry, Shropshire, May 12

JUMPED FROM BEHIND - 94 year old man using walking frame, attacked from behind, thrown to floor and mugged. Bournemouth, May 11

BEATEN TO DEATH - 94 year old blind lady murdered by two home intruders,

Birmingham, May 11

MURDERED AT HOME - 83 year old man attacked in his home by intruders, found dead. Worcestershire, June 11

ARSON - Care home full of elderly residents set ablaze in the middle of the night in arson attack. Residents treated for shock and smoke inhalation. Leeds, June 11

MUGGING MURDER - 89 year old lady who served in the WAAF during the war attacked for shopping bag on the street and left with serious head injuries resulting in death. Cleckheaton, West Yorks, June 11

SECATEURS ON THROAT - Partially sighted 89 year old man awoken in bed with man pressing secateur blade pressed up against his throat. Wallet stolen, panic alarm and phone disconnected. Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Jul 11

100 YEAR OLD MUGGED - Five Eastern Europeans dragged a 100 year old lady from her wheelchair and shoved her into a shop toilet to steal her pension, Romford, Essex, Aug 11

BROKEN ARM - 87 year old lady thrown to the ground and mugged on her way to church, Glasgow, Aug 11

BROKEN JAW - 87 year old lady attacked in street by three muggers. Dragged along the ground, jaw broken, shattered arm and facial injuries, Bradford, Aug 11

BADLY BEATEN - 85 year old lady attacked in her home by intruders, taken to hospital for cuts and bruising, Belfast, Sept 11

DOUBLE ATTACK - 89 and 94 year old ladies have their homes forcibly entered by burglars, the 94 year old was held down in her bed for 20 minutes, as another burglar ransacked the house. The 89 year old was left with injuries to her arm, after three men entered her home. Northern Ireland, Oct 11

BROKEN JAW - 85 year old man attacked on his way to church by a gang and left with broken jaw. Denaby, South Yorks. Nov 11

HEAD INJURIES - 90 year old lady hospitalised with large gash to forehead and black eye after three men invade her home. Bolton, Lancs. Nov 11

MURDER - An 88 year old lady found murdered in her own home, killed by an intruder. Southport, Merseyside. Feb 12

HOSPITALISED - 91 year old lady attacked in her home by intruders who pretended to be delivering flowers. Smothered with cushion, cuts and heavy bruising to arms and legs. Tameside, Mar 12

BATTERED - 89 year old man hospitalised after home attack by burglars. Police said 'The level of violence used was beyond comprehension', Wigan, Mar 12

MURDERED - 92 year old WWII Royal Navy veteran found murdered in his home. Willenhall, West Midlands, Apr 12

MUGGED - 89 year old RAF D-Day veteran walking with a zimmer frame attacked on the street by two men who stole his £200 pension that had to last him a month. Rainham, Essex, Apr 12

BASEBALL ATTACK - 86 year old man attacked in his home by three intruders wielding metal bars and baseball bats. Dislocated shoulder and heavy bruising to face and body. Birmingham, Apr 12

FRACTURED SKULL RESULTING IN DEATH - Wheelchair bound 94 year old lady

attacked in her bed by intruders, fractured skull, broken bones, metal inserts required for arm and severed finger. Died in hospital. Birmingham, May 12

SLASHED HAND - An 88 year old lady fought off an intruder wielding 6 inch knife.

Taken to hospital with knife wound to hand. Worksop, Notts May 12

BRITAINS OLDEST PERSON - 112 year old lady that still lived independently in her own flat robbed three times by same man in period of weeks, once pushed up against wall in her front room, found lying on floor, neighbour who came to her aid threatened with knife. Her fiance was killed in the WW1 trenches, and never married and in WWII her house was demolished by a doodlebug bomb. London Jul 12

MUGGED - 89 year old lady mugged on the street by two men. One grabbed her arms from behind whilst the other stole money from her handbag. Huddersfield Jul 12

COLLAPSED & DIED - 90 year old lady conned by 3 men posing as water board workers who then got into her home for 30 minutes collapsed when the police arrived and died the following morning. Wolverhampton Aug 12

MURDERED - 85 year old lady bludgeoned to death in her own home by two intruders. Southampton, Aug 12

BLOOD CLOT ON BRAIN - 91 year old WWII ex Army nurse attacked in street for £20 in purse. Hit head on pavement and required brain surgery to remove clot. Severe bruising and broken right arm. Highgate, London, Aug 12

Links to news reports on all of the above crimes can be found at
www.theunknownwarriors.co.uk/silentscandal

Oft In The Stilly Night

By Thomas Moore

(A lament played by the massed bands at the Cenotaph every Remembrance Sunday)

Oft in the stilly night,
Ere Slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
Of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears,
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken,
The eyes that shone
Now dimmed and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus in the stilly night,
Ere Slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

When I remember all
The friends, so link'd together,

I've seen around me fall,
Like leaves in wintry weather;
I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garland's dead,
And all but he departed!
Thus in the still night,
Ere Slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

'LET THOSE THAT COME AFTER SEE TO IT THAT THEIR NAMES BE NOT
FORGOTTEN'

For more information about the book and World War Two visit the website
www.theunknownwarriors.co.uk

Also available in e-book format.